

“BUT THEIR FACES WERE ALL LOOKING UP”:
AUTHOR AND READER IN THE *PROTEVANGELIUM OF JAMES*

by

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A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of
the Graduate School, Marquette University,
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for
the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Milwaukee, Wisconsin
May 2014

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ABSTRACT
“BUT THEIR FACES WERE ALL LOOKING UP”:
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Eric M. Vanden Eykel, B.A., M.A., M.Div.

Marquette University, 2014

This is a study about the *Protevangelium of James* (PJ), an “infancy gospel” that recounts the birth and childhood of Mary, the mother of Jesus. It is also a study about authors, readers, texts, meaning, and how they are interrelated. In it I aim to take seriously the insights of “intertextuality,” not as a matter of source criticism but as an approach to literature that is concerned with the reader’s active role in determining meaning in a text. The methodology I develop in Chapter One situates intertextual phenomena in a historically oriented study of ancient texts. I maintain that the reader’s discernment of intertexts has the capacity to generate new layers of meaning, and that these layers may reveal new aspects of the author’s meaning, some of which the author may not have anticipated.

After outlining the history of research on PJ in Chapter Two, I set out the results of my approach in exegetical chapters devoted to specific episodes in the life of the Virgin. In Chapter Three I examine Mary’s childhood in the Jerusalem temple (PJ 7-9), where she dances at the altar and receives food from an angel. I argue that the second-century reader understands her dancing as cultic worship, and her angelic diet as preservation for her role in God’s redemption of Israel. In Chapter Four I explore the image of Mary’s spinning thread for the temple veil (PJ 10-12). I suggest that the reader conceives of her work as participation in the forces that govern human fate, and that the tearing of the veil at the crucifixion locates her power within the overarching divine plan. Finally, in Chapter Five I address the episode of Jesus’ birth in the cave outside Bethlehem (PJ 17-20). This space, I maintain, prompts the reader to see Jesus’ birth through the lens of the Passion Narratives, as a foreshadowing of his crucifixion and burial, and to visualize his death as the moment that he is “born” as Israel’s Messiah.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The following pages were made possible by the efforts of many. I would like to first thank the Arthur J. Schmitt Foundation for granting me a fellowship for the 2012-2013 academic year. Their generosity made the timely completion of this project a reality. Thanks are likewise due to my dissertation committee, Joshua Ezra Burns, Andrei A. Orlov, and Sharon Pace, for their willingness to read and comment on this manuscript, for their support throughout the process of writing it, and for the charity they showed at my defense. I also owe a debt of gratitude to my adviser, Julian V. Hills, whose enthusiasm for this project has at times seemed to rival my own. From the early stages of planning until the final revision of the manuscript, his keen exegetical and editorial insights grounded my sometimes-random musings and helped form them into something intelligible. I have benefitted greatly from his example in the classroom and his passion for excellence at the editing table. To the rest of the faculty in the Theology Department at Marquette University and to my fellow graduate students, I am grateful for your friendship and untiring support.

I would also like to thank my family for so many years of encouragement. My parents, Cathy and Ike Vanden Eykel, taught me the importance of family, hard work, and finding joy in what ever you do. They have been constantly understanding of my desire for more education, and they frequently came to my aid when they heard the “professional student” epithet, even if the words sometimes seemed to hold truth. My in-laws, Louise and Brian Koranda, always understood when I brought my work with me on vacation or to Thanksgiving. Even in spite of my perceived workaholism, they allowed me to marry Ellen, who has endured with the perseverance of a saint the prodigious crankiness that frequently accompanied my long and lonely sojourns in the library. Our marriage has been a source of stability in the often-uncertain waters of doctoral studies, and I am grateful for the partnership we enjoy. And finally, thanks are due to my daughter Jane. Born two weeks before I began writing, she reminds me every day that many things are more pressing and indeed of greater and more lasting consequence than the writing of dissertations. I am thankful for her and for her wisdom.

ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
<i>ABD</i>	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
AdvSem	Advances in Semiotics
AGSU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Spätjudentums und Urchristentums
<i>AJT</i>	<i>American Journal of Theology</i>
<i>AnBoll</i>	<i>Analecta Bollandiana</i>
<i>ANRW</i>	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i>
ANT	Apocrypha Novi Testamenti
ASBF	Analecta Studium Biblicum Franciscanum
ASH	Ancient Society and History
ATLABS	ATLA Bibliography Series
<i>Aug</i>	<i>Augustinianum</i>
AYB	Anchor Yale Bible
BAC	The Bible in Ancient Christianity
BBOS	Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Studies
<i>BBR</i>	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BED	Bibliotheca Enrico Damiani
BET	Beträge zur Evangelischen Theologie
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
<i>BibRev</i>	<i>Bible Review</i>
<i>BMMLA</i>	<i>The Bulletin of the Midwest Modern Language Association</i>
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries
BS	Bellarmino Series
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>CCR</i>	<i>Coptic Church Review</i>
CChrSA	Corpus Christianorum Series Apocryphorum
CGNTC	Cambridge Greek New Testament Commentary
CH	Church History
<i>CI</i>	<i>Critical Inquiry</i>
CSRLC	Cambridge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture
CTQ	Collection Tel quel
ECC	Eerdmans Critical Commentary
<i>EL</i>	<i>Ephemerides liturgicae</i>
<i>EM</i>	<i>Ephemerides Mariologicae</i>
EP	European Perspectives
EPRO	Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire romain
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
FCB	Feminist Companion to the Bible
<i>FM</i>	<i>The Festal Menaion</i>
FP	Florilegium Patristicum
<i>GRBS</i>	<i>Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies</i>
HBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
<i>HBT</i>	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
HHM	Harvard Historical Monographs
HTKNT	Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament

<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>ICMR</i>	<i>Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations</i>
ISBL	Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature
<i>JAAC</i>	<i>The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism</i>
JACE	Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum Ergänzungsband
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JBQ</i>	<i>Jewish Bible Quarterly</i>
<i>J ECS</i>	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
KEK	Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament
KSL	Konzepte der Sprach-und Literaturwissenschaft
LANT	Les apocryphes du Nouveau Testament
LCBI	Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
MB	Le Monde de la Bible
<i>MH</i>	<i>Museum Helveticum</i>
<i>Mus</i>	<i>Muséon: Revue d'études orientales</i>
NA	New Accents
NAW	New Ancient World
NBS	Nouvelle Bibliothèque Scientifique
<i>NedTTs</i>	<i>Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift</i>
NET	Neutestamentliche Entwürfe zur Theologie
NGS	New Gospel Studies
<i>NJBC</i>	<i>The New Jerome Biblical Commentary</i>
<i>NLH</i>	<i>New Literary History</i>
NICNT	The New International Commentary on the New Testament
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
NTOA	Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OECS	Oxford Early Christian Studies
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTP	Old Testament Pseudepigrapha
PMLAA	Publications of the Modern Language Association of America
PA	Philosophia Antiqua
<i>PL</i>	<i>Philosophy and Literature</i>
PRS	Perspectives in Religious Studies
<i>PRSt</i>	<i>Perspectives in Religious Studies</i>
<i>RelS</i>	<i>Religious Studies</i>
RTT	Research in Text Theory
SA	Scriptores Aethiopici
SAAA	Studies in the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles
SB	The Scholars Bible
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBL SBL	Society of Biblical Literature Studies in Biblical Literature
SBLSP	Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers
SBLTT	Society of Biblical Literature Texts and Translations
SFSHJ	South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism

<i>SH</i>	<i>Subsidia Hagiographica</i>
SHAW	Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften
SHR	Studies in the History of Religions
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SP	Sacra Pagina
SPNT	Studies on Personalities of the New Testament
SS	Studia Sinaitica
STAC	Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
TENTS	Texts and Editions for New Testament Study
THL	Theory and History of Literature
<i>ThTo</i>	<i>Theology Today</i>
TI	Theological Investigations
TS	Texts and Studies
<i>TSK</i>	<i>Theologische Studien und Kritiken</i>
TU	Texte und Untersuchungen
ULCS	University of London Classical Studies
VCSup	Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WEST	Westminster Bible Companion
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WSA	Wiener Slawistischer Almanach
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
WUNT2	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2
<i>ZdZ</i>	<i>Zwischen den Zeiten</i>
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>
ZTK	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

INTRODUCTION

I asked for a lawyer, and they brought me an avocado.

Umberto Eco¹

This is a study about an ancient text and the reading of ancient texts. It began as a quest to articulate a hunch. I first encountered the object of my study, the *Protevangelium of James* (hereafter, PJ), while in coursework at Marquette University. Shortly thereafter, I began reading through the Gospel of Luke, which had been my central research preoccupation for many years, and I found myself thinking in new ways about this canonical text that I had grown so familiar with. I noticed things that I had not noticed previously, and I asked questions that I had never before thought to ask. Something had happened in my reading of PJ that influenced the way I read Luke.

To note but one example: As I read the account of the presentation of Jesus (Luke 2:22-38), I was drawn to the character of Anna, the elderly, widowed prophetess who lives perpetually in the temple (Luke 2:36-38). Her presence in Luke is enigmatic, and much ink has been spilled in attempts to determine what her purpose in the narrative might be. According to Rudolf Bultmann, she and Simeon (Luke 2:25-35) are duplicates (*Dubletten*), which explains why Luke does not recount her words to Mary and Joseph: Simeon has already spoken.² Robert C. Tannehill argues that Simeon and Anna together “represent the

¹ Eco, “How to Travel with a Salmon,” in *How to Travel with a Salmon and Other Essays* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1994), 8.

² Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition* (rev. ed.; trans. John Marsh; New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 299.

long history of an expectant people, nourished by God's promise."³ Luke Timothy Johnson suggests similarly that they symbolize the welcoming of Jesus by certain among the people of God.⁴ Though aware of the scholarly debates on this mysterious woman, I could not help but consider another possibility. Remembering that Mary's mother in PJ is a woman named Anna who at one point bewails her widowhood (PJ 2:1), and that she and her husband bring Mary to live in the temple (PJ 7:4-10), I wondered, Might the Lukan Anna be Jesus' maternal grandmother?

I realized immediately the folly of my proposal: PJ is the earliest extant attestation of Mary's parents' names, and it *postdates* Luke by roughly one hundred years (or more, depending on how one dates PJ and Luke). It is therefore not likely that the Anna of Luke 2:36-38 shares any sort of blood relationship with Mary or Jesus, at least not as far as Luke is concerned. Because the author of PJ reveals a familiarity with Luke, the suggestion that he or she interprets the Lukan Anna as related to Mary and Jesus is firmly in the bounds of historical-critical inquiry. But the same cannot be said for the claim that Luke himself invokes a text or tradition of which he is unaware. I therefore set out to study PJ on more traditional grounds, exploring how its author understands and retools his or her preexisting source material, all the while harboring a secret hope that my unorthodox hypothesis would bear fruit.

³ Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, vol. 1: *The Gospel According to Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 39.

⁴ Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (SP 3; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991), 56-57. Additional interpretations of Anna in J. K. Elliott, "Anna's Age (Luke 2:36-37)," *NovT* 30 (1988): 100-102; Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 150-51; Todd Klutz, "The Value of Being Virginal: Mary and Anna in the Lukan Infancy Prologue," in *The Birth of Jesus: Biblical and Theological Reflections* (George J. Brooke, ed.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 71-87; Bonnie Thurston, "Who Was Anna? Luke 2:36-38," *PRSt* 28 (2001): 47-55.

PJ and Intertextuality

In the early stages of my research, I encountered an article by the South African NT scholar Willem S. Vorster that rekindled my suspicions about the effect that PJ had exercised on my reading of Luke.⁵ Vorster proposes intertextual methodology as “a heuristic device in the study of early Christian literature,” PJ serving as a test case.⁶ “Reading,” he argues, “is not a neutral process. Like text production it is a dynamic process in which intertextual references play a significant role.” Characters are of particular importance to what he terms the “intertextual assignment of meaning.” That is, “when a reader encounters a character in a particular text which he already knows from another text, two texts are activated, the text he is reading and the pretext.”⁷ When texts present the same character differently, the result is a *recasting* of that character into something new. Although Vorster’s article confirmed for me that there might be something to my theory about the relationship of PJ’s Anna to Luke’s prophetess, it was in need of expansion in terms of both scope and method.

Regarding scope, Vorster shows little interest in exploring connections that exist outside those between PJ and canonical texts. As the author of PJ draws primarily from the OT and NT in the construction of the narrative, a study of his or her use of sources demands attention to these texts. On the other hand, because intertextual methodology is concerned with the *reader’s* perception of intertexts, the author’s knowledge of a text (or lack thereof)

⁵ Vorster, “The Protevangelium of James and Intertextuality,” in *Text and Testimony: Essays in Honor of A. F. J. Klijn* (eds. T. Baarda et al.; Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1988), 262-75; repr. in *Speaking of Jesus: Essays on Biblical Language, Gospel Narrative & the Historical Jesus* (ed. J. Eugene Botha; NovTSup 92; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 449-64.

⁶ Idem, “Protevangelium and Intertextuality,” 263.

⁷ Ibid., 271-72.

is not the standard by which its validity as intertext is granted. It is therefore necessary to broaden this study to include texts that exist outside the Christian canon. What is more, Vorster's primary focus in this article is the relationship between PJ 1-7 (the childhood of Mary) and 1 Sam 1-2 (the childhood of Samuel). He references other portions of the narrative, but they receive scant attention. The connection has been explored in the past, often with similar results.⁸ In light of the consideration already given to this section of the text (by Vorster and others), it seems fitting to move beyond it by applying intertextual methodology to additional episodes.

Regarding method, it is clear from his discussion of intertextuality that Vorster is aware of the implications of this so-called heuristic device, but it is unclear how they translate into praxis.⁹ In examining the correspondences between PJ 1-7 and 1 Sam 1-2, for example, he posits that "in the narration of the story of Mary, ... the author had his own point to make. The reader is prompted to fill in the story of Mary with his knowledge of the story of Samuel, but also to correct his version by taking seriously the point of the new story and the differences with the pretext. While Samuel is prepared for a 'ministry,' Mary is prepared to become the virgin mother of Jesus."¹⁰ The claim that the author of PJ bases this section of the narrative on the story of Samuel is well taken, as is the notion that his or her

⁸ Vorster acknowledges as much (*ibid.*, 273). Because it is almost certainly intentional on the part of the author, 1 Sam 1-2 is not, in a technical sense, an intertext; it is a literary allusion.

⁹ He references numerous "authorities" on the topic, including Julia Kristeva, *Σημειωτική: Recherches pour une sémanalyse* (CTQ; Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1969); Karlheinz Stierle, "Werk und Intertextualität," in *Dialog der Texte: Hamburger Kolloquium zur Intertextualität* (eds. Wolf Schmid and Wolf-Dieter Stempel; WSA 11; Vienna: Wiener Slawistischer Almanach, 1983), 7-26; Manfred Pfister, "Konzepte der Intertextualität," in *Intertextualität: Formen, Funktionen, anglistische Fallstudien* (eds. Ulrich Broich and Manfred Pfister; KSL 35; Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1985), 1-30.

¹⁰ Vorster, "Protevangelium and Intertextuality," 273-74.

departures from it prompt a certain reaction in the reader. But the reader's response to the author's appropriation of the Samuel material is never made explicit, and Vorster does not articulate the effect of the reader's knowledge of 1 Sam 1-2 on his or her interpretation of PJ. He sets the stage for the reader to play a role in the "dynamic process" of reading, but his central concern is the author's intentional employment of pretexts. It is not that Vorster misunderstands the concept of intertextuality, but that he does not take it far enough.

Intertextuality has become a fashionable heading under which to explore the question of an author's sources: if an allusion is made to another text, the connection is called "intertextual." But the situation is more complex than this thin definition allows. Classically understood, intertextual methodology examines relationships between texts from the perspective of the *reader*, not the *author*. By discovering these relationships, the reader participates in the determination of a text's meaning. An intertextual hermeneutic thus poses a challenge to historical-critical approaches that would concentrate solely on an author's intention in writing and the meaning he or she wishes to convey. Even so, the two need not be construed as mutually exclusive, and in this respect, perhaps the greatest contribution of Vorster's article is a proposition he offers in conclusion: "I am of the opinion that there is the possibility of progress in the researching of ... ancient documents if we accept the work of our predecessors who emphasized the use of sources, but reformulate the problem in view of production and reading and not in terms of origin and transmission only."¹¹

Taking this article as a starting point, the question remains, How does intertextuality as a heuristic device, informed by more conventional author-centric exegesis, further our understanding of early Christian literature in general and PJ in particular? The following

¹¹ Ibid., 275.

chapters are my attempt to answer this question. The methodology I propose in Chapter One holds together three controls that ground intertextual phenomena in a more historically oriented study of ancient texts: first, the author's meaning (as far as it is discernable) sets up a boundaries for meanings that may legitimately succeed it; second, the reader as hermeneutical construct allows him or her to be endowed with a skill set befitting the aims of the interpreter; and third, the regulation of the hypothetical reader's intertextual canon limits the range of possible interlocutors to a realistic scope. My goal is to provide a reading of PJ that will benefit from the achievements of intertextual methodology while upholding the centrality of the author and the meaning he or she intends to convey.

The Author

At a 2012 exhibition of Cindy Sherman's photography at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, a placard read as follows: "Masquerading as a myriad of characters, Cindy Sherman ... invents personas and tableaux that examine the construction of identity, the nature of representation, and the artifice of photography."¹² Peter Schjeldahl comments on this statement: "The images do no such thing, of course. They hang on walls. The pathetic fallacy of attributing conscious actions to art works is a standard dodge, which strategically depeoples the pursuit of meaning."¹³ The fallacy he speaks of is as prevalent in literary criticism as it is in art criticism: when faced with interpreting a text, it is easy for the critic to

¹² The exhibit ran from February 26-June 11, 2012.

¹³ Schjeldahl, "Faces: A Cindy Sherman retrospective," *The New Yorker* (March 5, 2012): 84.

forget that the object of his or her study is the consequence of human agency. The author and the artist are frequently eclipsed, both by their works and addressees.

The first component of this methodology is a relocation of the author in the hermeneutical equation. To this end, I employ Wolfgang Iser's notion that a literary work is comprised of two poles: the artistic and the aesthetic. The former is the author's text, the latter the reader's response to that text. Both are necessary for interpretation. Moreover, I draw from several distinctions made by E. D. Hirsch, whom Kevin Vanhoozer dubs "the preeminent champion of the author and of objectivity in interpretation."¹⁴ Hirsch distinguishes between a text's *meaning* and its *significance*, namely, what its author intends it to mean and how it is capable of being construed in relation to anything else (other texts, personal experiences, etc.). The meaning of a text remains stable over time, but its significance may change with subsequent interpreters.

Hirsch addresses the issue of "unconscious" or "unintended" meanings by differentiating between *subject matter* and *implication*, between an author's understanding of a concept and all that the concept may imply. The example of a tree serves as an illustration:

If someone heard the word "tree" spoken by a child, a woodsman, a botanist, or a poet, he would very reasonably guess that in each instance the word probably carried different implications. Specifically, he might infer that the botanist implied not only the part of the tree that is above ground, but the root system as well. A child, on the other hand, though he could be aware that a tree has roots, might mean simply the part of the tree that is visible.

Knowledge of the author (or speaker) and his or her own level of understanding assists the interpreter in separating what the *author* means by "tree" (meaning) from what the *concept*

¹⁴ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in this Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 74.

itself implies (subject matter).¹⁵ Awareness that an author has no knowledge of root systems, for example, limits the scope of the subject matter to be considered.

The search for an author's intended meaning is not an exact science, but an exercise in establishing relative probabilities. Hirsch acknowledges as much. Nevertheless, the attempt at finding it affirms that it exists and is relevant to the task of interpretation. The author's meaning is not a hegemonic principle that will allow for only one reading, but is rather a framework in which subsequent readings occur.

The Hypothetical Reader

Benjamin Jowett once claimed that the reader's responsibility in interpreting biblical texts is to become as transparent as possible: "The true use of interpretation is to get rid of interpretation, and leave us alone in company with the author."¹⁶ Many have critiqued Jowett's position as either foolishly optimistic or epistemologically ignorant.¹⁷ But in spite of its critics, it remains influential, even paradigmatic, for much of biblical scholarship. The question is often not *whether* the reader is a part of exegesis, but the extent to which the

¹⁵ Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 58-59.

¹⁶ Jowett, "On the Interpretation of Scripture," in *Essays and Reviews* (London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1861), 384.

¹⁷ James Barr accuses Jowett of being unable to follow his own prescription: "Jowett was hardly a historical thinker; his mind was literary, linguistic and, especially, philosophical" ("Jowett and the 'Original Meaning' of Scripture," *ReIS* 18 [1982]: 434; idem, "Jowett and the Reading of the Bible 'Like any Other Book,'" *HBT* 4 [1982]: 3). Jon Levenson, in more positive terms, argues that emphasis on the author serves "to restore passages to their historical context, to avoid anachronistic interpretation, and to recover the sense of growth and dynamism of the biblical tradition that redaction and canonization have suppressed" (*The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism: Jews and Christians in Biblical Studies* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993], 99-100). Also Bultmann, though not responding to Jowett in particular: because the reader is a part of history, any interpretation of a text requires the reader's concurrent self-interpretation ("Das Problem einer theologischen Exegese des Neuen Testaments," *ZdZ* 3 [1925]: 334-57).

reader *should be* a part of exegesis. One of the greatest contributions of modern literary theory has been to articulate with greater clarity the reader's role in the interpretive process. The reader is no longer considered a passive agent whose sole duty is to channel the meaning of the author; he or she is an active participant in the determination of meaning.

The emphasis on the reader leads to the second component of this methodology: definition of the reader's identity and his or her role in the reading process. The reader participates in the construal of meaning by discerning intertexts, instances where the author's text *resonates* with those from the reader's own portable library. The author's text and the intertext(s) become sounding boards, and the reader discerns the new figuration that results from their resonating with one another. The ability to detect intertextual resonance increases in proportion with the breadth of the reader's knowledge: the more texts that he or she is familiar with, the greater the chances he or she will hear echoes between those texts. The paradigmatic "intertextual reader," in this respect, is one with a broad knowledge of texts, particularly those contemporary with or predating the author's text.

While it is relatively simple to conceive of such readers in a modern, largely literate culture, the situation is more complicated in an ancient, largely *illiterate* culture. Iser's distinction between the real and the hypothetical reader is helpful in this regard. The hypothetical reader is a useful tool for the study of ancient texts, as it allows for the description of a reader whose historical existence is possible but not required: the reader as envisioned by the interpreter *may* have existed, but this is beside the point. The benefit of the category is twofold: it permits, from a reader's perspective, the analysis of texts which, relatively speaking, would have been "read" by few persons, and it allows interpreters to decide precisely what their readers do and do not know.

I address the topic of the hypothetical reader by noting three examples of the concept in practice: Iser's "implied reader," Stanley Fish's "informed reader," and Umberto Eco's "model reader." As one who occupies the middle ground between the artistic and aesthetic poles of a literary work, Iser's implied reader serves as a reminder that meaning cannot be restricted to either the author's text or the reader's response to that text: it is only present fully where the two intersect. Fish's informed reader demonstrates that the act of reading is a slow, intentional process in which the reader anticipates the author's next move while remaining open to having his or her hypotheses challenged. Moreover, Fish's notion of interpretive communities affords a degree of stability to the reading process: by dictating certain "strategies" that precede the act of reading, interpretive communities predetermine a text's *shape*, but not necessarily its *meaning*, before it is read. I adopt from Eco's theory what is commonly taken to be a fundamental insight, that texts, by indicating the knowledge required for fuller understanding, are responsible for creating the identities of their model readers. That is, they simultaneously form the readers that they presuppose.

The Intertextual Canon

Because an intertextual hermeneutic is concerned with the *reader's* perception of intertexts, the question of the knowledge that he or she brings to the act of reading is crucial. In his oft-cited *Figure of Echo*, John Hollander likens the reader to a person listening for echoes in a "cave of resonant signification." The author's text is the source of the echoes (or intertexts), and the cave walls represent the context in which it is "heard." The distinction between an echo and a literary allusion is important. An allusion is a conscious attempt by the author to evoke memory of a precursor text, whether by explicit citation or

implicit suggestion. An echo is a *type* of allusion, but one that does not depend on conscious intention: an author may echo another text without intending to do so. Some echoes fade quickly, while others resonate with and transform the sound of the original voice.¹⁸ Because the precise shape and size of Hollander's cave differs in relation to the person standing inside, each cave will generate different echoes.

Nothing prevents an interpreter from situating an ancient text in a modern cave of resonant signification. Many of the echoes that result from such an exercise will be anachronistic, but they are nonetheless fruits of an intertextual approach. A historically oriented study demands limiting the reader's "intertextual canon" to resemble more closely the canon of the author, who hears his or her text in light of his or her own unique experiences, knowledge of other texts and cultural phenomena. Although readers may share certain aspects of the author's milieu, they are unable to mirror them exactly, so they listen for echoes in a cave "analogous to" but not identical with that of the author.¹⁹ The delineation of the reader's intertextual canon is comparable to the construction of this cave. The goal is twofold: to determine which texts that would have been available to a reader contemporary with the author, and to refine this selection in relation to the author's text.

This final component requires an initial setting of boundaries while allowing for their subsequent modification. Eco's notion of a text's cultural encyclopedia, which he designates as a type of labyrinth, is instructive. The encyclopedia of a given text is vast,

¹⁸ Hollander, *The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 65.

¹⁹ Ibid. Even if a reader was capable of *perfectly* reconstructing the author's cave, he or she could not occupy the same physical ground as that of the author: just as it is impossible to stand in another's shoes without first requesting that they be taken off, a reader cannot stand in the author's position without first dislodging the author and assuming his or her place.

comprising all aspects of the culture that text was penned in, including other texts, works of art, platitudes, communal memories, presuppositions, concepts, etc. It is labyrinthine by virtue of the fact that every point may be legitimately connected with every other point. And because it does not “lead” anywhere specific, the one who enters charts his or her own path, and may theoretically “wander” endlessly.

A literary text constitutes its author’s own journey through the encyclopedia, and it is designed to guide others along the same path. While following the steps of the author, the reader may explore portions of the labyrinth that are accessible from the predetermined route. He or she does so with the ultimate goal of returning to the path with the knowledge obtained in tangential exploration, as this knowledge may uncover different aspects of the author’s text. Assuming the presence of some details related to date and provenance, the boundaries of the intertextual canon are set preliminarily to include all aspects of a culture (textual or otherwise) that were available at the time of the text’s composition.

These boundaries are refined as the interpreter discovers cultural elements that the author betrays familiarity with. In his influential *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, Richard B. Hays proposes seven criteria “for testing claims about the presence and meaning of scriptural echoes in Paul”: availability, volume, recurrence, thematic coherence, historical plausibility, history of interpretation, and satisfaction.²⁰ These criteria may also be used to adjust the limits of the reader’s intertextual canon. The first is similar to Eco’s cultural encyclopedia: because it is impossible for a reader to form intertextual relationships between the author’s text and one that is inaccessible to them (for whatever reason), a text is

²⁰ Outlined in Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 29-32. Expanded in idem, *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel’s Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 34-45.

excluded if it would have been unavailable to an ancient reader. The rest operate in relation to specific echoes and intertexts that the reader proposes. They permit exploration of a text's cultural encyclopedia while ensuring that the reader does not venture too far from the text and become lost in the labyrinth. That is, they encourage the reader to probe the territory adjacent to the author's path and to make connections that are not *necessarily* foreseen by the author. In this way, the text itself remains the reader's central preoccupation.

The final criterion, satisfaction, is often the most influential in determining the validity of an intertext. The question, in short, is whether the proposed reading gives a satisfying account of the author's text. This criterion rests on the twofold assumption that the author's meaning exists and that it is comprehensible without the discernment of intertexts. Moreover, it confirms Hirsch's stipulation that the adept interpreter may only seek a text's *significance* once he or she has understood its *meaning*. Eco maintains on similar grounds that the acknowledgment of a text's meaning (its literal sense) precedes the reader's attempts to amplify that meaning.

The return to the author's centrality sets up something comparable to what Grant R. Osborne terms the "hermeneutical spiral," a gravitation toward the author and the meaning he or she intends to convey: "I am not going round and round a closed circle that can never detect the true meaning but am spiraling nearer and nearer to the text's intended meaning as I refine my hypotheses and allow the text to continue to challenge and correct those alternative interpretations."²¹ The seeking of intertexts and the new figurations they generate is a tool that allows interpreters to understand more fully the text they read. It is employed

²¹ Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1991), 6.

here, not as a way of abandoning the author but as a way of supplementing the question of a text's production with its reception.

Procedure

The methodology outlined here will receive fuller treatment in the following chapter. In Chapter Two, I review the history of scholarship on PJ, including issues relating to its manuscript tradition, date, provenance, structure, genre, and its relationship to the NT. I also cite several recent scholars who have advocated for reading it as a literary unit. Chapters Three through Five are devoted to specific episodes in the life of the Virgin: PJ 7-9 (Mary in the temple); 10-12 (Mary's spinning and the annunciation); and 17-20 (the birth of Jesus). I begin each of these exegetical chapters by summarizing the history of research on the episode in question and any historical and literary peculiarities that may facilitate or impede interpretation. I then address the author's intention by means a literary-critical analysis. Because they are integral components of the narrative, I include in this analysis instances where the author alludes *explicitly* to other texts.

I dedicate a portion of each exegetical chapter to exploration of PJ's cultural encyclopedia, with the goal of detecting echoes and intertexts from the perspective of the hypothetical ancient reader. In the absence of overt citation, the subtlety of these "points of contact" makes it difficult to categorize them as intentional components of the author's intention (or not). While I am certain that a line exists between references that an author intends for the reader to hear and references that the reader actually hears, I am also convinced that it is frequently impossible to locate it with any certainty. Further study may reveal that some of the references I explore in the exegetical chapters are in fact part of the

author's intended meaning. The goal in addressing them here is to show that they are feasible from a reader's perspective. Because intertextuality by definition describes a bidirectional relationship, each of these "explorations" concludes with an account of the new figurations that result from an intertextual reading of PJ, and how these may in turn affect the reader's understanding of the proposed echoes and intertexts.

The title of this study, " 'But Their Faces Were All Looking Up,' " comes from the first-person narration of Joseph in PJ 18, wherein he describes the stilling of creation in the moments before Jesus is born. I found it a suitable title for two reasons. First, the conjunction at the beginning reminds the reader that no passage exists in isolation from what surrounds it; every text has a context. Second, and perhaps more importantly, the image of the faces looking up towards heaven captures one of the central conclusions of this study, namely, that PJ's Mariology, properly understood, points toward and deepens one's understanding of the person of Jesus; Mariology serves Christology.

Finally, a brief word on technical matters. Translations of biblical texts are from the NRSV unless otherwise noted. Passages from the HB are cited with their LXX counterparts as HB/LXX unless there is sufficient difference between them to warrant individual citations. Translations of PJ are my own. Footnotes, bibliography, and abbreviations for ancient and modern sources follow the formatting guidelines in Patrick H. Alexander et al., eds., *The SBL Handbook of Style* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999). Abbreviations for Greek sources not in the *Handbook* are from G. W. H. Lampe, ed., *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961); additional Latin sources, from Albert Blaise and Henri Chirat, eds., *Dictionnaire latin-français des auteurs chrétiens* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997).

CHAPTER 1 – AUTHOR, READER, AND ANCIENT MEANINGS

To one is it given to create the things of art, and
to another to judge what measure of harm and of
profit they have for those that shall employ them.

Plato, *Phaedrus* 274.e.7-9

The Jesuit Karl Rahner once likened discourse on method to the honing of a knife: “If we want the knife to cut we must first sharpen it. But if we confine ourselves to sharpening the knife alone then we have not yet done any good cutting.”¹ It is a commonplace for works of biblical scholarship to be preoccupied with sharpening, neglecting to venture past method and toward engagement with the texts they aim to study. To borrow a phrase from Vanhoozer, they become entangled in a “hermeneutics of procrastination.”² But one does not cut without sharpening, and as the chief goal of this study is a fresh interpretation of an ancient text, some methodological grounding is necessary.

The methodology developed in this chapter has two objectives: first, to take seriously the insights of *intertextuality*, the relatively novel and often misunderstood approach to literature that is concerned with the reader’s active role in determining a text’s meaning; and second, to ground these insights in a historically oriented study of ancient texts. I propose three controls that mitigate some of the issues between intertextual and historical-critical

¹ Rahner, *Confrontations 1* (TI 11; trans. David Bourke; New York: Crossroad, 1982), 84.

² Vanhoozer, “Lost in Interpretation,” *JETS* 28 (2005): 92. For the purposes of this study, “hermeneutics” refers to matters related to interpretive theory, i.e., discourse about interpretation, while “interpretation” is restricted to the conscious discernment of meaning, i.e. interpretation *qua* interpretation). On this distinction, see Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 10-17.

methodologies: the centrality of the author's meaning; the identity of the reader as a construct; and the regulation of the reader's intertextual canon. I argue that the reader's discernment of intertexts has the capacity to generate new layers of meaning, and that these layers may reveal new aspects of the meaning that the author intends.

1.1. Intertextuality—Peril and Promise

Inquiry into the relationship between texts is a *sine qua non* for biblical scholarship; the way an author employs other texts in composition yields knowledge of the author's understanding of his or her subject. Analysis of these relationships has traditionally been conducted under the rubrics of *Quellenkritik*, *Redaktions-* and *Traditionsgeschichte*. But recent years have seen a burgeoning interest in “intertextuality” as a heading under which to explore similar correlations. The move toward intertextuality is more than the exchanging of old labels for new. Rather, it signals the adoption of a new hermeneutical model.

1.1.1. Origins of Intertextuality

“Intertextuality (*intertextualité*)” was first coined in 1967 by Julia Kristeva (largely in passing) with reference to the idea that “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another.”³ The concept is an expansion of

³ Kristeva, *Σημειωτική*, 143-73; idem, “Word, Dialogue and Novel,” in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (ed. Leon S. Roudiez; EP; New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 66; originally in idem, “Bakhtine, le mort, le dialogue et le roman,” *Critique* 23 (1967): 438-65. Commenting on this basic definition, Vorster points out that “intertextuality” is no new phenomenon: “The ancients, similar to what we do, made use of anterior texts, imitated other texts, and alluded to precursor and contemporary texts in producing their own texts.” What *is* new is “the way in which the phenomenon is perceived ... the way in which we regard these relationships”

two aspects of Mikhail Bakhtin's literary theory: heteroglossia and dialogism.⁴ *Heteroglossia* refers to the varieties of language present in both spoken words and texts. Characteristic of every society, heteroglossia is, according to Allon White, "Bakhtin's key term for describing the complex stratification of language into genre, register, sociolect, dialect, and the mutual interanimation of these forms."⁵ *Dialogism* is the process by which meaning is discerned in a heterogloss culture: every utterance, spoken or written, stands in relationship with others, and meaning results when the respective contexts of utterances clash. Meaning, for Bakhtin, is a consequence of friction rather than peaceful affiliation: "The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention."⁶ Because of the dialogic and heterogloss nature of language, there is an endless variety of sometimes disparate voices behind every word.

Kristeva joins Bakhtin's theory with the semiotics of Ferdinand de Saussure, who draws a distinction between speech (*parole*) and language (*langue*). *Langue* is "both a social product of the faculty of speech and a collection of necessary conventions that have been adopted by a social body to permit individuals to exercise that faculty."⁷ *Parole* refers to an

("Intertextuality and Redaktionsgeschichte," in Draisma, *Intertextuality in Biblical Writings*, 20.

⁴ Standard surveys of Bakhtin's works include Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle* (THL 13; trans. Wlad Godzich; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); Sue Vice, *Introducing Bakhtin* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997); Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World* (2d ed.; New Accents; London: Routledge, 2002).

⁵ White, *Carnival, Hysteria and Writing: Collected Essays and an Autobiography* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 136.

⁶ Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist; Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 293.

⁷ Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (2d ed.; trans. Wade Baskin; New York: The Philosophical Library, 1959), 9. It is, moreover, "the interlocking set of forms that the language

individual's execution of the linguistic system, "the social crystallization" of *le langage*.⁸

Kristeva notes that *parole* and *langue* in Saussure's theory, though distinct, are inseparable. That is, *parole* is only comprehensible within the system of shared signs (*langue*) to which *actes de parole* refer: "*Le langage* is a prerequisite for speech to occur; but at the same time, there is no *langue* in the abstract without the occurrence of speech."⁹

Kristeva's synthesis of Bakhtin and Saussure amounts to a redefinition of what counts as a "text" and how meaning is construed. Even the text's recipient (*destinataire*) is to be included in the "discursive universe" of that text "as discourse itself."¹⁰ Kristeva represents "meaning" by a set of two interlocking axes: context-text (vertical) and subject-addressee (horizontal). Their conjunction demonstrates that "each word (text) is an intersection of word (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read."¹¹ Because the locations of these axes shift constantly with different readers, the precise point at which they meet is never the same. It is therefore impossible to speak of a text having *a* meaning, as its

faculty assumes among a group of individuals at a particular time" (idem, *Writings in General Linguistics* [trans. Carol Sanders and Matthew Pires; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006], 85).

⁸ Idem, *Course*, 13.

⁹ Kristeva, *Language, the Unknown: An Initiation into Linguistics* (trans. Anne M. Menke; New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 10. Comparing the theories of Bakhtin and Saussure, Holquist observes that the former emphasizes the syntagmatic features of language, while the latter stresses the paradigmatic: "Dialogism is a philosophy more of the *sentence* than it is of the *sign*" (*Dialogism*, 42).

¹⁰ Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue and Novel" in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (Leon S. Roudiez, ed.; EP; New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 66. The reader is thus a type of "text" that participates in the "absorption and transformation" that is intertextuality. The same is true for the author and his or her context, as well as the context of the reader. So Manfred Pfister: for Kristeva, "everything—or, at least, every cultural formation—counts as a text" ("How Postmodern is Intertextuality?" in *Intertextuality* [ed. Heinrich F. Plett; RTT 15; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991], 212).

¹¹ Kristeva, "Word," 66.

meaning is only discernible in its relationship with other texts.¹² It is in light of Kristeva's theory that her mentor, Roland Barthes, is able to declare the so-called death of the author: "To give a text an author is to impose on that text a limit, to furnish it with a final significance, to close the writing."¹³

Leon S. Roudiez observes that Kristeva's *intertextualité* was welcomed enthusiastically, but that it "has since been much used and abused" and "has been generally misunderstood."¹⁴ In Irwin's words, the term "has come to have almost as many meanings as users, from those faithful to Kristeva's original vision to those who simply use it as a stylish way of talking about allusion and influence."¹⁵ "Intertextuality" is frequently employed in biblical studies as a flashy label intended to revivify seemingly passé source-critical and traditio-historical methods. More than a simple misunderstanding, such applications of Kristeva's *intertextualité* constitute a failure to recognize fully the baggage that it travels with.¹⁶

¹² So William Irwin: "Signifiers do not refer to anything beyond, to anything outside the system of signifiers" ("Against Intertextuality," *PL* 28 [2004]: 228).

¹³ Barthes, "La mort de l'auteur," *Manteia* 5 (1968): 16; ET in idem, "The Death of the Author," in *The Death and Resurrection of the Author?* (ed. William Irwin; Westport: Greenwood, 2002), 3-7.

¹⁴ Rodiez, "Introduction," in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 15.

¹⁵ Irwin, "Against Intertextuality," 227-28. Also Hays, on the irony of the matter: "Once the idea of 'intertextuality' was set loose in the academy, ... it could no longer be controlled by Kristeva's original intention (!)" ("Foreword to the English Edition," in *Reading the Bible Intertextually* [eds. Richard B. Hays et al.; Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009], xiii).

¹⁶ Dennis R. MacDonald, for example, cites what he considers examples of "early Christian intertextuality": "the Synoptic Problem, the use of sources in the Gospels and Acts, and the relationships among the Gospels of John and Thomas and the Synoptics" ("Introduction," in *Mimesis and Intertextuality in Antiquity and Christianity* [Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2001], 1). Hays comments: "In works of this kind, the emphasis on diachronic order remains paramount, and critical attention focuses on the biblical author's intention in appropriating references to earlier texts

1.1.2. Intertextuality in Biblical Studies

It is not the case that biblical scholars *en masse* have misunderstood the concept. In his *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash*, Daniel Boyarin lists three “senses” of intertextuality germane to his study: “that the text is always made up of a mosaic of conscious and unconscious citation of earlier discourse ... that texts may be dialogical in nature ... [and] that there are cultural codes, again either conscious or unconscious, which both constrain and allow the production ... of new texts within the culture.”¹⁷ Additionally, Robert L. Brawley summarizes well the difference between intertextual and “conventional” methodologies. The latter, he writes, “measures a successor text by how precisely it reflects the literary and historical context of its precursor ... [it] actually splits precursor and successor apart by viewing them in their own literary and historical contexts.” Intertextual phenomena, by contrast, are *interdependent* formulations. What one text expresses in its own voice is altered by the voice of the other, and the interaction between the two recasts the meaning of the independent parts.”¹⁸ In short, intertextuality works both ways, and the

within a new literary setting” (“Forward,” xii). Less than a decade after coining the expression, Kristeva herself proposed exchanging it for another: “Since this term has often been understood in the banal sense of ‘study of sources,’ we prefer the term *transposition* because it specifies that the passage from one signifying system to another demands a new articulation of the thetic—of enunciative and denotative positionality” (*Revolution in Poetic Language* [trans. Margaret Waller; New York: Columbia University Press, 1984], 60).

¹⁷ Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (ISBL; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 12.

¹⁸ Brawley, “Canon and Community: Intertextuality, Canon, Interpretation, Christology, Theology and Persuasive Rhetoric in Luke 4:1-13,” in *SBL Seminar Papers, 1992* (SBLSP 31; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 420-21 (emphasis added); also in idem, “An Absent Complement and Intertextuality in John 19:28-29,” *JBL* 112 (1993): 428-29. Similarly George Aichele and Gary Phillips: “Texts acquire meaning to the extent that they are situated in relation to other texts in a web of mutual interference and illumination ... intertextuality raises important questions about the dynamic and systemic nature of texts, of writing, of reading, indeed of the material production of meaning

interplay between texts has the capacity to generate something new, “a figuration that goes beyond the sum of the meanings of the independent texts.”¹⁹

This new figuration is not a new meaning *per se*, but is rather a new *layer* of meaning that is generated through the act of reading.²⁰ The most striking aspect of intertextual methodology in this regard is the place of primacy granted to the reader’s imagination, the location where the “play” between texts occurs and the new layer of meaning is discerned: “A reference to an old text locates the modern interpreter in a tensive ambience of echoes between the two texts, and the question is how the two texts reverberate with each other.”²¹

Brawley is not alone in upholding intertextuality as a fruitful paradigm for biblical scholarship. A recent collection of essays, *Reading the Bible Intertextually*, is a case in point.²² In its first chapter, Stefan Alkier argues that a text “is precisely nothing other than a relational mass,” and (*à la* Kristeva) that intertextuality includes all aspects of culture,

within communities of readers. Intertextuality underscores the role of interference in the social setting where texts, subjects, and meaning are constructed” (“Introduction: Exegesis, Eisegesis, Intergesis,” *Semeia* 69-70 [1995]: 8).

¹⁹ Brawley, “Canon and Community,” 421; also Lubomir Doležel: “Through intertextuality, texts are bound together in a relationship of mutual semantic illumination” (*Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds* [Parallax; Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998], 201).

²⁰ So Brawley, *Text to Text Pours Forth Speech: Voices of Scripture in Luke-Acts* (ISBL; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 1.

²¹ Idem, “An Absent Complement,” 430. Also in idem, *Text to Text*, 8.

²² Richard B. Hays et al., eds., *Reading the Bible Intertextually* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009); originally published as Richard B. Hays and Stefan Alkier, eds., *Die Bibel im Dialog der Schriften: Konzepte intertextueller Bibellektüre* (NET 10; Tübingen: Francke, 2005). Similar collections include Sipke Draisma, ed., *Intertextuality in Biblical Writings: Essays in Honour of Bas van Iersel* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1989); Danna Nolan Fewell, ed., *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible* (LCBI; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992); Daniel Marguerat and Adrian Curtis, eds., *Intertextualités: La Bible en échos* (MB 40; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2000); Richard B. Hays and Stefan Alkier, eds., *Revelation and the Politics of Apocalyptic Interpretation* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2012).

including but not limited to texts.²³ Following Brawley, he conceives of the influence between texts and other referents as bidirectional: “The meaning potential of both texts is altered through the intertextual reference itself.”²⁴ Steve Moyise posits in the same volume that every text “can only be understood as part of a web or matrix of other texts, themselves only to be understood in the light of other texts.” A text’s meaning, therefore, “is not fixed but open to revision as new texts come along and reposition it.”²⁵

Hays frames the goals of intertextual study, which he understands as the “study of the *semiotic matrix* within which a text’s acts of signification occur,” as coinciding with those of historical-critical methodology.²⁶ Not all share his perspective. Thomas R. Hatina argues that intertextuality, properly understood, is “inimical to current historical-critical inquiry.”²⁷ In his view, it is attractive for two reasons: it is trendy, “a result of the perpetual search for new and creative approaches to biblical interpretation”; and it provides a framework in which to speak of the relationship between the OT and NT.²⁸

²³ Alkier, “Intertextuality and the Semiotics of Biblical Texts,” 4.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁵ Moyise, “Intertextuality and Historical Approaches to the Use of Scripture in the New Testament,” 23-24.

²⁶ For Hays the primary difference is that critics such as Barthes and Kristeva are more interested in the matrix itself, whereas he is more interested in specific places where an author (Paul) quotes or alludes to a specific text or texts (*Echoes*, 15).

²⁷ Hatina, “Intertextuality and Historical Criticism in New Testament Studies: Is There a Relationship?” *BibInt* 7 (1999): 29.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 41-42. Similarly Ellen van Wolde: recent “intertextual” approaches to biblical texts “[seem] the result of a superficial sightseeing tour: the exegetes in question stretch their legs at the station of intertextuality but the question remains of how seriously they use their time to get acquainted with what this station has to offer” (“Trendy Intertextuality?” in Draisma, *Intertextuality in Biblical Writings: Essays in Honour of Bas van Iersel*, 43).

Biblical scholars, according to Hatina, have neglected three problematic characteristics of intertextual methodology: its ideological context; its integrated concept of text; and its inability to distinguish itself from the study of textual influence. First, intertextuality as defined by Kristeva is politically loaded: “[Her] main emphasis was on language theory, [but] the concept of intertextuality was inseparably connected with political idealism, ... the subversion of the bourgeois establishment through the empowerment of the reader/critic to resist and combat the literary and social tradition at large.” Traditional hermeneutics, he argues, continues to operate from an author-oriented perspective.²⁹

The second characteristic is what Hatina calls the “integrated concept of text,” the idea that every text is related to others as a “mosaic of quotations without quotation marks.” This leads to the phenomenon that Jacques Derrida terms *différance*, the notion that words may only be defined via recourse to other words, which in turn leads to an endless deferring of meaning.³⁰ If texts are nothing but collections of references to other texts, then they have no meaning apart from their relationships with the texts to which they refer. And without the reader, the infinite web of relationships short-circuits.³¹ The second characteristic is related to the first in that both place what Hatina considers undue emphasis on the reader at

²⁹ Hatina, “Intertextuality,” 30. Also Leroy A. Huizenga: “Kristeva’s idea of intertextuality is a call for a new hermeneutics that would take full account of the role of readers in the production of meaning and support political activism” (*The New Isaac: Tradition and Intertextuality in the Gospel of Matthew* [NovTSup 131; Leiden: Brill, 2009], 47). One may perhaps take issue with the argument against intertextuality *vis-à-vis* the particular political ideology from which it was born, as it is possible to argue that the text- or author-centered approaches are themselves grounded in a particular ideology to which Kristeva et al. are responding.

³⁰ Hatina, “Intertextuality,” 33. *Différance* is an intentional mutilation of the French *différer*, which may be translated either as “to differ” or “to defer.” The significance of the misspelling is that it may only be perceived in written form, as *différance* and *différence* are pronounced identically.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 34.

the expense of the author. In historical-critical methodology, the author and his or her text remain the exegete's primary foci.

The third difficulty is less with intertextuality itself than with the way it has (or rather, has *not*) been implemented: "It must be shown how intertextuality as a theory contributes new content and insights to traditional approaches of studying the use of scripture or other traditions in the New Testament."³² Hatina references Hays's study of Paul's allusion to Job 13:16 in Phil 1:19 as an example.³³ He calls the connection "enlightened," but concludes that Hays "remains committed to the historical-critical method, to the centrality of the author, and to an interpretation or meaning that finds its boundaries within the written text and its historical context." His question is simple: "Why does Hays use the term 'intertextuality,' given all its complexity and ideological baggage?"³⁴

At the root of Hatina's critique is a tendency that has already been mentioned: the "dressing up" of traditional methodologies in fancier parlance. Yet he claims that the issue is more complex, namely, that the topic of *influence* is often detached from intertextuality in poststructuralist interpretation.³⁵ Some critics have attempted to reconnect the two by seeking to situate texts in their cultural and historical milieus, but there remains much work

³² Ibid., 36.

³³ Briefly, τοὔτό μοι ἀποβήσεται εἰς σωτηρίαν in Philippians is a "verbatim citation of words lifted from Job 13:16 (LXX)," and in Job the passage "is part of a lengthy speech where Job, rejecting the facile insinuations of comforters who attribute his suffering to some secret iniquity in his character, proclaims his own integrity and his trust that he will in the end be vindicated before God." And "If ... Paul likens himself to Job, the echo whispers a suggestion that the rival preachers [in Philippians] have assumed the mantle of Job's hollow comforters; the falsehood of both will be exposed ultimately in the judgment of God" (*Echoes*, 21-24).

³⁴ Hatina, "Intertextuality," 36.

³⁵ Ibid., 37.

to be done.³⁶ Hatina concludes that historical criticism and intertextuality seem to be separated by an unbridgeable chasm, and that the *gravitas* of the issues is such that attempts to reconcile them will ultimately be in vain.³⁷

1.1.3. Suggesting a Way Forward

Moyise agrees with Hatina when he argues that intertextual theories and historical criticism “belong to conflicting ideologies and should not be equated.” But neither, in his view, is well suited to study the relationships between texts: historical criticism “overreaches itself when its ideology of single authorial meaning is to the fore”; and intertextual methodology, by contrast, focuses on the fluidity of a text’s meaning. What is needed is not a divorce of these ideologies, but a new synthesis that will allow them to complement one another.³⁸

The controls outlined in the remainder of this chapter are my attempt at such synthesis. The first is that of authorial intent, and the extent to which an author’s meaning is relevant to interpretation. With reference to this question, I adopt several distinctions made by Hirsch. I maintain that his delineation between *meaning*, *significance*, *subject matter* and *implication* allows one to speak of an author’s intention existing alongside meanings different from than that intention. To this end, I also employ Iser’s notion that

³⁶ In particular, the essays in Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein, eds., *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), specifically Clayton and Rothstein, “Figures in the Corpus: Theories of Influence and Intertextuality” (3-36), and Susan Stanford Friedman, “Weavings: Intertextuality and the (Re)Birth of the Author” (146-80).

³⁷ Hatina, “Intertextuality,” 42.

³⁸ Moyise, “Intertextuality,” 32.

literary work is comprised of an artistic and aesthetic pole, and that interpretation requires both. Second, I address the issue of the reader's identity and role in the reading process via Iser's distinction between real and hypothetical readers. Given the relative scarcity of literate persons in antiquity, the category of the hypothetical reader is useful insofar as it allows for the positing of readers whose historical existence is possible but not required. I illustrate this concept by means of the respective theories of Iser, Fish, and Eco.

Third, there is the question of the text and its relationship with others. If a text is indeed a mosaic of quotations, whether implicit or explicit, and if interpretation occurs in light of a text's perceived dialogue with others, then how are its interlocutors designated? Because the range of possible interlocutors depends on the identity of the reader and the authority granted to the author, the way one answers this question is contingent upon how one has answered those that precede it. I address the question via Hays's criteria for the detection of echoes and Eco's theory of the cultural encyclopedia. I conclude by examining the relationship between the reader's perception of intertextual echoes and the author's meaning.

1.2. The Role of the Author and Authorial Intent

David Steinmetz once lamented that "contemporary debunking of the author and the author's explicit intentions has proceeded at such a pace that it seems at times as if literary criticism has become a jolly game of ripping out an author's shirt-tail and setting fire to it. The reader and the literary work to the exclusion of the author have become the central

preoccupation of the literary critic.”³⁹ The issue is not whether texts *have* authors; words on a page would not exist otherwise.⁴⁰ It is difficult to disagree with this rudimentary claim, regardless of one’s ideology. Even Barthes, in pronouncing the death of the author, cannot deny that authors are responsible for the creation of texts. But the author’s purpose is frequently seen as inessential for interpretation, and in its place, the author, the readers, and indeed the texts themselves become the arbiters of meaning.

The question of the author’s meaning and the exegete’s access to it is a complex one. Particularly with ancient texts, whose authors have long since perished, discernment of their *raison d’être* can be laborious. By emphasizing the importance of the author’s meaning, I neither uphold the author as the *sole* determiner of meaning nor eliminate the possibility that readers may interpret texts in ways that their authors did not intend. Rather, I propose that the author’s meaning establishes boundaries for interpretations that may legitimately succeed that meaning; it does not tell the interpreter what she or he will find, but it does prevent the interpreter from finding whatever she or he wishes. I begin with Hirsch, who presents the interpreter with a mandate to seek the author’s meaning while simultaneously allowing for readings that may differ from it.

³⁹ Steinmetz, “The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis,” *ThTo* 37 (1980): 37.

⁴⁰ So Matthew Baldwin: “Common sense tells us writings continue to emerge only from the activities of particular human beings” (*Whose Acts of Peter? Text and Historical Context of the Actus Vercellenses* [WUNT 2.196; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005], 21). Similarly Wayne C. Booth: “No author, no text and no reader” (Edward Bloom et al., “In Defense of Authors and Readers,” *Novel* 11 [1977]: 7).

1.2.1. Meaning vs. Significance

In the same year that “intertextuality” first appeared in print and one year before Barthes declared the death of the author, Hirsch published a monograph calling for the author’s resuscitation. When the author is banished from the interpretive process, he argues, the critic assumes his or her place, and that when the author’s intention is inconsequential there exists no principle by which to judge the validity of one interpretation over another.⁴¹ His solution to the problem of “authorial irrelevance” is twofold: first, that every text has a singular and normative meaning, that of the author, and that this meaning remains stable over time; and second, that distinguishing between *meaning* and *significance* specifies the various tasks related to interpretation.⁴² The distinction encourages cooperation between author and reader while allowing them to differ in their interpretations.

When Hirsch speaks of a text’s *meaning*, it is always with reference to its *verbal meaning*, or “whatever someone has willed to convey by a particular sequence of linguistic signs and which can be conveyed (shared) by means of those linguistic signs.”⁴³ This definition depends on two related principles: *determinacy* and *sharability*. Verbal meaning is *determinate* because it is characterized by limits: “If a meaning were indeterminate, it would have no boundaries, no self identity, and could therefore have no identity with a meaning

⁴¹ Hirsch, *Validity*, 5.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 31. Cf. Iser: while no one denies that all texts contain a historical substratum, the “meaning” of a text, because it is found in the reader’s interpretation, cannot be limited to the author’s intended meaning (“Indeterminacy,” 3-5).

entertained by someone else.”⁴⁴ Words or phrases may have an array of possible meanings, but even an array is a “determinate entity” with boundaries.⁴⁵ Because words cannot mean anything that the author (or the critic) wishes, determinacy is a basic requirement for verbal meaning.

The principle of *sharability* (or *reproducibility*) underlies what Hirsch deems “the norms of language,” and it allows the author’s intended meaning to be communicated to a reader: “If meaning were not reproducible, it could not be actualized by someone else and therefore could not be understood or interpreted.”⁴⁶ A text’s meaning, because it is what its author intended, does not change. An author may alter his or her opinion, even expressing this shift in later texts, but the meaning codified in the original remains the same.

The same cannot be said of a text’s *significance*, defined by Hirsch as the relationship of the text’s verbal meaning with any referent chosen by the critic: “a person, or a conception, or a situation, or indeed anything imaginable.”⁴⁷ Meaning is limited and static by virtue of the norms of language, but significance is by definition unlimited and subject to change over time and in different contexts. Hirsch’s significance is not altogether foreign to the claim that intertextual relationships exercise influence on what readers find in the course

⁴⁴ Hirsch, *Validity*, 44. So also Iser: “The written text imposes certain limits on its unwritten implications in order to prevent these from becoming too blurred ... these implications, worked out by the reader’s imagination, set the given situation against a background which endows it with far greater significance than it might have seemed to possess on its own” (“The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach,” *NLH* 3 [1972]: 281).

⁴⁵ Hirsch, *Validity*, 45.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 44. And elsewhere: “No linguistic code can determine the meanings of a text, because linguistic codes by themselves are far too capacious and flexible to determine meanings for individual texts. Some special human agency or act is needed to decide upon the choice of a governing sub-code” (“On Justifying Interpretive Norms,” *JAAC* 43 [1984]: 90).

⁴⁷ Moreover, “when critics speak of changes in meaning, they are usually referring to changes in significance” (Hirsch, *Validity*, 8-9).

of reading. The difference is that Hirsch stresses the centrality of the author in the hermeneutic equation, and would resist the claim that *meaning* in any way results from intertextual resonance.⁴⁸

Meaning and significance are constituted by distinct goals: the seeking of meaning is the task of the interpreter, whereas the construal of significance is the goal of the critic.⁴⁹ While the line of demarcation may be hazy at times, Hirsch insists that the reader must decide which will receive most of his or her attention: “All textual commentary is a mixture of interpretation and criticism, though usually a choice has been made as to which goal is to receive the main emphasis.” But in either case, “the indication of significance assumes that a prior construction of meaning has been made.”⁵⁰

This distinction is similar to Iser’s notion that all literary works have two “poles”: the *artistic* (verbal aspect) and the *aesthetic* (affective aspect). The first is the author’s text, while the second is the realization of that text accomplished in and by the reader. Attention to the artistic pole precedes attention to the aesthetic, guiding the reader’s reaction and keeping it from arbitrariness: “If communication between text and reader is to be successful, clearly the reader’s activity must also be controlled in some way by the text ... the guiding devices operative in the reading process have to initiate communication and to control it.”⁵¹

⁴⁸ Hirsch modifies this position slightly in later works, arguing that “certain present applications of a text may belong to its meaning rather than its significance.” But the distinction remains important (“Meaning and Significance Reinterpreted,” *CI* 11 [1984]: 210).

⁴⁹ Hirsch, *Validity*, 9.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 140-41.

⁵¹ Iser, *Prospecting: From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 33; *idem*, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 21.

The literary “work” is not identical with either pole, but is always situated between them. And interpretation requires both, for both cooperate in the production of meaning: “The convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence, and this convergence can never be precisely pinpointed, but must always remain virtual, as it is not to be identified either with the reality of the text or with the individual disposition of the reader.”⁵² Because the literary work is fluid, constantly shifting with the identity of the reader, the goal of interpretation is to examine each pole without losing sight of their interrelatedness.⁵³ Without both, it is impossible to speak of a text as having “meaning” in any sense.⁵⁴

1.2.2. The Possibility of Unintended Meaning?

If a text’s meaning is what its author intends it to mean, then to speak of a meaning *unintended* by the author would appear to be a contradiction in terms. But even in stressing the centrality of the author’s meaning, Hirsch takes seriously the issue of *unconscious* meanings, instances where a text seems to connote something different from what its author intends.⁵⁵ He proposes two more categories that further define the issue: *subject matter* and

⁵² Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction From Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 275. See also idem, *Act of Reading*, 21; idem, “Reading Process,” 279.

⁵³ Iser, “Reading Process,” 279; Bloom et al., “Defense,” 20-21.

⁵⁴ Similarly Eco on the two levels of interpretation: on the *semantic* level, an addressee “fills up” a “Linear Text Manifestation” with meaning. Every reader-response approach deals with this “natural semiotic phenomenon.” On the *critical* level, the interpreter gives reasons why a text produces the response that it does (*The Limits of Interpretation* [AdvSem; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990], 54-55).

⁵⁵ Hirsch rightly distinguishes between unconscious meaning and a *subconscious* or “symptomatic” meaning, “a ‘tendency’ ... that has no strands tying it directly to a conscious impulse,

implication. His treatment of both as dependent on verbal meaning provides a paradigm for beginning to speak of interpretations of a text that are distinct from but not necessarily opposed to the author's meaning.

The idea that readers may understand texts better than their authors is not new. Immanuel Kant once claimed to have understood certain of Plato's works better than Plato: "It is by no means unusual, upon comparing the thoughts which an author has expressed in regard to his subject ... to find that we understand him better than he has understood himself."⁵⁶ While Kant may have possessed a more mature comprehension of ideas addressed by Plato, this does not amount to a better understanding of what Plato *intended* in their application.⁵⁷ Kant's claim, according to Hirsch, illustrates a failure to distinguish between *subject matter* and *meaning*. The two are distinct in that subject matter is subject to the unconscious, while meaning is not: "It is not possible to mean what one does not mean, though it is very possible to mean what one is not conscious of meaning."⁵⁸

Because conscious and unconscious meanings are by definition located in the realm of verbal and syntactical probability, the reader in search of the author's meaning may arrive at several feasible options. Hays notes, for example, in his well-known work on echoes in the Pauline corpus, that Paul's discourse is shaped so pervasively by Israel's scriptures that

is not willed in the ordinary sense of the term." Symptomatic meanings are "involuntary accompaniments to meaning, that is, *symptoms* of meaning, not linguistic signs representing meaning" (*Validity*, 52). Meaning remains a consequence of the author's will, so by Hirsch's definition it is not possible for a text to *mean* something different from that intention. Unconscious meanings in this respect are less meanings and more constituents of the author's meaning that are activated in the reading process (*ibid.*, 21-22).

⁵⁶ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (trans. Norman K. Smith; London: Macmillan, 1930), 310. Noted in Hirsch, *Validity*, 19.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

determining the level of intentionality behind his quotations is often impossible: “Scripture plays a role even when it is not cited explicitly.”⁵⁹ On the one hand, an author may allude consciously, if subtly, to an exterior text in hopes that his or her reader will perceive the reference. On the other hand, a reader may hear in the author’s text echoes that are not intended by the author but are rather expressive of the author’s *milieu* or components of the subject matter of which he or she is unaware.

Subject matter and meaning are related to the extent that subject matter is part of the shared system of signs that makes the communication of meaning possible. Conflation of the two can be a problem, especially when the critic’s familiarity with a given subject matter surpasses that of the author. In this case, the critic’s own knowledge may be projected on to the author, which in turn may lead to a false construal of the author’s intention.⁶⁰ Alternately, the critic may conclude (*à la* Kant) that his or her superior grasp of the *subject matter* is equivalent to an understanding of the text’s *meaning* that is rivaled by none, including the author.

The issue of subject matter is related to *implication*, “the knottiest problem of interpretation.”⁶¹ Implication is complex to the extent that the subject matter used by an author may imply more than he or she intends. But unconscious meanings must exist in the range of *possible* meanings allowed by a text: “Meaning cannot exceed or arbitrarily delimit

⁵⁹ Hays, *Conversion*, 30.

⁶⁰ Eco warns similarly that readers must be cautious not to superimpose their own expectations as readers onto the expectations that the author intended (*Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994], 10).

⁶¹ Hirsch, *Validity*, 27.

the conventional semantic possibilities of the symbols used.”⁶² This restriction is precisely what makes the issue complicated: if both conscious and unconscious meanings fall within the boundaries of what a text may permit, then the author is ultimately responsible for indicating which is the actual meaning. The question is infinitely more complicated with respect to ancient authors, many of whom are known only through the sometimes fragmentary texts they leave behind. And if an author’s knowledge of a particular subject matter is constructed solely on the basis of his or her texts, there is a danger of what Hirsch terms “circular entrapment,” the notion that “each set of data will very powerfully support the interpretive theory which sponsored it in the first place.”⁶³

Inquiry into the author’s socio-historical location aids in the task of determining what he or she does or does not intend by a given subject matter, but even then it must be conceded that our knowledge is limited. And in light of this limitation, distinguishing between conscious and unconscious meaning is often impossible, especially when the author is unavailable to comment on what he or she intended to convey by the subject matter in question. Hirsch maintains that while the *question* of conscious vs. unconscious meaning is

⁶² Idem, “Three Dimensions of Hermeneutics,” *NLH* 3 (1972): 256. Similarly Paul Ricoeur: “Only for an interpretation are there two levels of signification since it is the recognition of the literal meaning that allows us to see that the symbol still contains more meaning. This surplus of meaning is the *residue* of the literal interpretation” (*Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* [Forth Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976], 55 [emphasis added]).

⁶³ He cites as an example the criticisms directed at Michael G. F. Ventris’s decryption of the Linear B script in the early 1950s, noting that “some scholars very justly objected that such a decipherment had the property of confirming itself because its internal consistency was guaranteed in advance. The decoded elements had been used to construct the very system which gave rise to the decoded elements.” Ventris’s decryption was only confirmed as valid when it was applied successfully to texts that were not used in the construction of the Linear B cipher (*Validity*, 165-66).

irrelevant in these cases, the *distinction* remains necessary: it helps one “to avoid confusing an author’s verbal meaning with his personality, mentality, historicity, and so on.”⁶⁴

1.2.3. In Search of the Author’s Meaning

The search for the author’s meaning is an integral component of this methodology for three reasons. First, it affirms the notion that texts exist only because of the people who write them. The attempt to determine their authors’ intentions helps the interpreter avoid the pitfall of attributing conscious activities to unconscious media: texts “do” little without cooperation between their authors and readers. Second, it demands diligent historical inquiry. Familiarity with the socio-cultural and literary conventions of the author’s world exposes the interpreter to features of the text that may otherwise go unnoticed, and entering into this world enables the interpreter to hear the author’s voice on his or her own terms.⁶⁵ Third, the search sets up a framework in which intertextual resonances may be discerned. In Hirsch’s words, “Whatever one may do with a literary text *after* it has been understood on its own terms achieves validity only because that preliminary task has been performed.”⁶⁶

The task of determining authorial intent is aided by determining the *genre* of the text under examination, as the reader’s perception of what a text *is* will affect how he or she reads and understands it. Hirsch addresses the issue of genre under the rubric “type of

⁶⁴ Hirsch, *Validity*, 51.

⁶⁵ So Meir Sternberg: “There is nothing illegitimate about the endeavor to identify the historical writer(s) with a view to locating the narrative in its proper sociocultural matrix” (*The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985], 64).

⁶⁶ Hirsch, *Validity*, 113.

meaning,” which includes “the relationship assumed between speaker and interpreter, the type of vocabulary and syntax that is to be used, the type of attitude adopted by the speaker, and the type of inexplicit meanings that go with the explicit ones.”⁶⁷ A failure to identify a text’s genre correctly may obscure the reader’s understanding of its author’s meaning. One could, for example, read a lab report or legal brief in an effort to find literary allusions or plot cues, but the resultant findings cannot be counted as part of the author’s meaning, as the authors of such documents are (presumably) not writing with an eye to literary allusion or the formation of a plot. Lab reports and legal briefs belong to what J. L. Austin calls “constative utterances.” Texts of this sort relate phenomena that exist independently of the author, reader, and text, and the claims they make about these phenomena can be authenticated or inauthenticated by the reader’s appeal to objective reality.

“Performative utterances,” by contrast, “do not ‘describe’ or ‘report’ or constate anything at all, are not ‘true or false.’” As the label implies, “the issuing of the [performative] utterance is the performing of an action—it is not normally thought of as just saying something.”⁶⁸ Iser places literary texts in this category because “there is no concrete object corresponding to them in the external world.”⁶⁹ The author of a literary text creates its reality from elements existing in the real world, and this reality is activated by the reader’s response to the author’s text. Literary texts and other performative utterances are therefore

⁶⁷ Ibid., 72, 75.

⁶⁸ Austin, *How to Do Things With Words* (2d ed.; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 1-7.

⁶⁹ Iser, “Indeterminacy,” 7.

distinct from constative utterances insofar as they invite and indeed require a degree of creativity on the part of the reader.⁷⁰

Because PJ is a literary text, I employ literary-critical analysis in the exegetical chapters (below) in order to address the question of the author's intention, to understand the author's story *qua* story. I also address several of the more peculiar features of the individual episodes, including facts or claims that are historically problematic, places where the author deviates from traditions of which he or she is likely aware, and instances where there is evidence of a later editorial hand. The goal in doing so is to ensure that the historical task is not neglected in the pursuit of a "cleaner" narrative. Explicit allusions to other texts, because they belong to the author's conscious intention, are considered integral components of the narrative. Intertexts, because they are discerned by the reader but not necessarily willed by the author, are addressed separately.

Hirsch acknowledges that the determination of authorial intent is difficult and frequently hypothetical, and that any claim of discovering an author's meaning should be framed in terms of probability rather than certainty: "Every interpretation begins and ends as a guess."⁷¹ The quest for the author's meaning is not an exact science, but an exercise in positing which meaning is most likely.⁷² What is more, every interpretation remains partial,

⁷⁰ D. A. Carson illustrates a failure to distinguish between these two categories in his critique of the so-called new hermeneutic: " 'Polysemy' applied to entire texts is defended in the most naive way—that is, a theory that argues a text has many meanings, none of them objectively true, and all of them valid or invalid according to their effect on the interpreter. But such absolute relativism is not only unnecessary, but also self-contradictory; for the authors of such views expect us to understand the meaning of their articles!" (*Exegetical Fallacies* [2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996], 126).

⁷¹ Hirsch, *Validity*, 170.

⁷² So also Ricoeur: "To show that an interpretation is more probable in the light of what we know is something other than showing that a conclusion is true. So in the relevant sense, validation is

as it is impossible to explicate fully the author's meaning.⁷³ Even so, seeking the text's meaning helps to guard against readings that would stretch it to its breaking point.

1.3. The Identity and Role of the Reader

If texts are media of communication, then the reader is a necessary counterpart to the author.⁷⁴ The extent to which the reader is an integral part of this methodology is amplified: if interplays between texts and their readers have the capacity to generate something fresh, then this generation necessitates the reader's creative capacity. The modern interpreter is clearly a reader of sorts, but is far enough removed from the text that he or she cannot be the reader envisioned by the ancient author. To locate the reader in relation to the modern interpreter is to risk slipping into arbitrary and fanciful interpretations with no foothold in the world of the text. The reader's identity must therefore be sought elsewhere.

1.3.1. Literacy and Readers in Antiquity

Literacy is not a widespread characteristic of the ancient world, so caution is needed when speaking of the "reader" of an ancient text. In her study of the transmission of early Christian literature, Kim Haines-Eitzen demonstrates that even literacy among scribes in antiquity may not be assumed. She cites as an example a certain Petaus, a scribe appointed

not verification. It is an argumentative discipline comparable to the juridical procedures used in legal interpretation, a logic of uncertainty and qualitative probability" (*Interpretation Theory*, 78).

⁷³ Hirsch, *Validity*, 128.

⁷⁴ So Ricoeur: "It may be said, at least in an introductory fashion, that understanding is to reading what the event of discourse is to the utterance of discourse" (*Interpretation Theory*, 71).

in ca. 184 C.E. to the Egyptian village of Ptolemais Hormou, whose responsibilities would have included “assessing landownership, administering and processing census returns, dealing with uncultivated land, transporting grain, and so forth.”⁷⁵

All extant documents signed by Petaus bear the same formula: “I, Petaus, village scribe, have entered (Πεταῦς κωμογρα[μματεὺς] ἐπιδέδωκα).” One of the documents in his archive is a papyrus fragment (*P.Petaus* 121) on which he appears to be practicing his signature.⁷⁶ It is repeated twelve times, each line growing larger and less legible. In the fifth line, he inadvertently omits the initial vowel of the verb, substituting *πιδεδωκα* for *ἐπιδεδωκα*. He repeats the error in subsequent lines. Herbert C. Youtie posits that Petaus “was unable to introduce a correction at any point because he could not read what he wrote, and we understand in consequence why his papers have nothing from his hand except one formula.”⁷⁷ It would be a mistake to consider Petaus the rule rather than an exception. But the possibility that a person with such limited skills could hold his position should serve as a reminder that “literacy” in antiquity is, at the very least, a complex subject.⁷⁸

In his extensive study of the topic, William V. Harris defines literacy as the ability to read *and* write. He acknowledges that while these are arguably different skills, there is no indication that they were anything but complementary in antiquity: it is presumed that those

⁷⁵ Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians of Letters: Literacy, Power, and the Transmitters of Early Christian Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 27.

⁷⁶ An image of the fragment is printed in Jonathan L. Reed, *The HarperCollins Visual Guide to the New Testament* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 7.

⁷⁷ Youtie, “Βραδέως γράφων: Between Literacy and Illiteracy,” *GRBS* 12 (1971): 240; quoted in Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians*, 28.

⁷⁸ The ninth-century *Codex Coridethianus* (Koridethi) provides another example of “scribal illiteracy.” Noting the “rough, inelegant hand” in which the codex was written, Metzger and Ehrman conclude that its copyist “clearly was not familiar with Greek” (*The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration* [4th ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005], 83).

able to perform one task are likewise able to accomplish the other.⁷⁹ He argues that literacy rates undoubtedly varied from region to region, from as high as twenty to thirty percent in some cities to lower than five to ten percent in many of the provinces, and, in light of these variations, that the overall literacy rate from the Classical Greek Period (ca. 500-323 B.C.E.) through the fall of the Roman Empire (ca. 476 C.E.) was approximately ten percent.⁸⁰ “The written culture of antiquity,” he concludes, “was in the main restricted to a privileged minority—though in some places it was quite a large minority—and it coexisted with elements of an oral culture.”⁸¹

Harry Y. Gamble, among others, has critiqued Harris for possibly underestimating ancient literacy rates. Even so, Gamble concludes, “his invaluable survey has made it clear that nothing remotely like mass literacy existed, nor could have existed, in Greco-Roman societies, because the forces and institutions required to foster it were absent.”

Consequently, Gamble calls the results of Harris’s study “sobering to historians of early Christianity and its literature.”⁸² Christians in the first centuries of the Common Era, he observes, were mostly illiterate, “not because they were unique but because they were in this respect typical.” Familiarity with Christian literature was, for most, attained not through reading texts privately but through hearing them read publicly in worship or other settings. Public readings were the means by which the majority of the population was acquainted with

⁷⁹ Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 3-5.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 141, 272, 323-32.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 337.

⁸² Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 4-5.

literature, pronouncements, and official documents.⁸³ While the presence of literate persons in antiquity is indisputable, their relative paucity mandates that the issue of identifying an ancient text's reader be approached with care.

1.3.2. The Hypothetical Reader - Three Models

Iser distinguishes between real and hypothetical readers. The former exist and are known to us by means of their documented responses to texts. Modern interpreters are able to perceive how these readers understand texts because the readers themselves make this clear. But as they are accessible only through their recorded interpretations, it is often difficult to speak of ancient real readers with any real precision.⁸⁴ Hypothetical readers, by comparison, do not *necessarily* exist in any objective sense. Rather, they are constructs “upon whom all possible actualizations of the text may be projected.”⁸⁵ Because the works

⁸³ Ibid., 5-6, 205. There are exceptions to this rule, according to Gamble, but they are few: “Most lay Christians lacked the education, not to mention the leisure, that would make private devotional reading possible” (ibid., 10). More on public reading in antiquity in Jocelyn Penny Small, *Wax Tablets of the Mind: Cognitive Studies of Memory and Literacy in Classical Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 1997), 35-40.

⁸⁴ Real readers do not cease to exist in the absence of their recorded interpretations, but their availability to the interpreter fades in proportion to the scarcity of their extant works.

⁸⁵ Iser further divides the heading of hypothetical reader into two more specific categories: contemporary (*zeitgenössischen*) and ideal. The *contemporary* reader refers to the attempted retrieval of real readers from their various interpretations of texts: the contemporary reader may therefore resemble certain historical readers. The *ideal* reader is, in contrast, purely theoretical. He or she is a reader who possesses knowledge the same as that of the author and who interprets the text in exactly the same way as the author. The ideal reader is therefore “a structural impossibility,” and the author is in fact the only possible ideal reader. To an extent, the notion of an ideal reader makes the entire process of communication superfluous: “One only communicates that which is *not* already shared by sender and receiver.” But the ideal reader is useful insofar as he or she “can be endowed with a variety of qualities in accordance with whatever problem he is called upon to help solve,” and can thereby “close the gaps that constantly appear in any analysis of literary effects and responses” (*Act of Reading*, 27-29).

that the reader is familiar with will undoubtedly affect his or her reading of the author's text, the question of the reader's knowledge is essential.⁸⁶

Historical-critical methodology typically necessitates constructing the identity of a hypothetical reader, even if this task is not made explicit. This construction depends on the interpreter's aims, so it can take many forms. An interpreter may propose a hypothetical reader who is several hundred years removed from a text, and who is able to read it through the lens of whatever historical events may have transpired since its authorship. Alternately, he or she could establish the hypothetical reader's context as coincident with the author by restricting the reader's knowledge in one of two ways: by limiting it to sources that are *known* to the author, or to sources that are *available* to the author. In the first case, the reader knows only what the author knows, and is confined to examining only those texts that are physically present in the author's library, so to speak. In the second, the reader knows only what it would have been *possible* for the author to know, and he or she is free to examine texts that were accessible but not necessarily familiar to the author.⁸⁷

The articulation of hermeneutical aims, and thus the identity of a text's hypothetical reader, is illustrated by Eco's distinction between *interpretation* and *use*. Interpretation is the task of reading in order to discover something about the text itself. "To use a text," by contrast, is "to start from the text in order to get from it to something else, even accepting the risk of misinterpretation."⁸⁸ Hypothetical readers may be constructed toward both ends,

⁸⁶ So Hays, *Echoes*, 15.

⁸⁷ A hypothetical reader concurrent with Matthew, for example, may read this gospel in light of other sources circulating in the first-century Greco-Roman world, regardless of whether its author knew them.

⁸⁸ Eco, *Limits*, 57-58. Moreover, "A text can be *used* as criminal or psychoanalytical evidence, as hallucinatory device, or as stimulus for free association. But all of this has nothing to do with the

but the decision is not as simple as choosing between prolepsis on the one hand and fidelity to the author (or text) on the other. A hypothetical reader whose context is farther removed from that of the text will be more prone to anachronism than the reader who is a contemporary of the author, but *any* hypothetical reader, because he or she is not the author, is capable of misconstruing the author's meaning.

Questions abound with respect to the hypothetical reader and his or her role in the reading process. What does the reading process entail? What is the reader's role in it? Whence the identity of the reader? I here address these questions by means of three models: Iser's "implied reader"; Fish's "informed reader"; and Eco's "model reader."⁸⁹ These theorists are comparable in many respects, but they differ in their answers to the above questions. I begin with Iser, who provides a convenient point of transition from Hirsch. While he grants the reader a good deal of freedom in the reading process, he simultaneously grounds this freedom in the author's text.

interpretation of text *qua* text ... I see no reason to discourage a reading of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* purporting to demonstrate that its author was a polymorphous pervert and a latent homosexual, or that the idea of transcendental *a priori* forms conceals and disguises an unconscious necrophilia. (I am obviously inventing crazy forms of textual deconstruction but there are people doing similar things rather seriously)" (idem, "The Theory of Signs and the Role of the Reader," *BMMLA* 14 [1981]: 36).

⁸⁹ Other examples include Peter J. Rabinowitz's "authorial audience" ("Truth in Fiction: A Reexamination of Audiences," *CI* 4 [1977]: 126; idem, "Whirl without End: Audience Oriented Criticism," in *Contemporary Literary Theory* [eds. G. Douglas Atkins and Laura Morrow; Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1989], 81-82), Michael Riffatere's "superreader (*archilecteur*)" (*Essais de stylistique structurale* [NBS; Paris: Flammarion, 1971], 46), and Erwin Wolff's "intended reader" ("Der intendierte Leser: Überlegungen und Beispiele zur Einführung eines literaturwissenschaftlichen Begriffs," *Poetica* 4 [1971]: 141-66).

1.3.2.1. Wolfgang Iser's Implied Reader

Iser sees the act of reading as a process in which the reader participates in the production of meaning: "It is in the reader that the text comes to life."⁹⁰ His theory of aesthetic response refers to the dialectical relationship between text and reader, a relationship that "brings into play the imaginative and perceptive faculties of the reader in order to make him adjust and even differentiate his own focus."⁹¹ Because the reality of a literary text is a *formulated* reality, there are gaps that the reader must "fill in" with his or her own knowledge. This phenomenon, which Iser refers to as *indeterminacy*, is a characteristic of all literary texts.⁹² Indeterminacy comes into play in a literary text because, as a performative utterance, there is no definite object that the reader can use to judge whether the text has presented its subject properly. It is the means and the mandate by which the reader is drawn into the world of the text, "the force that drives us to work out a configurative meaning while at the same time giving us the necessary degree of freedom to do so."⁹³

⁹⁰ Iser, "Indeterminacy," 3; idem, *Act of Reading*, 19.

⁹¹ Idem., *Act of Reading*, x. Also, the novel "involve[s] the reader in the world of the novel and so help[s] him to understand it—and ultimately his own world—more clearly" (*Implied Reader*, xi).

⁹² Idem, "Indeterminacy," 12. Also Robert Alter, with regard to OT narratives: "An essential aim of the innovative technique of fiction worked out by the ancient Hebrew writers was to produce a certain indeterminacy of meaning, especially with regard to motive, moral character and psychology" (*The Art of Biblical Narrative* [New York: Basic Books, 1981], 12).

⁹³ Iser, *Implied Reader*, 287.

The *implied reader* is one “who embodies all those predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect.”⁹⁴ He or she “incorporates both the prestructuring of the potential meaning by the text and the reader’s actualization of this potential through the reading process.”⁹⁵ The author is ultimately responsible for the construction of this reader, but the identity of the implied reader remains elusive, as the author (or text) anticipates the presence of a reader but does not necessarily define him or her in specific terms: “The real reader is always offered a particular role to play, and it is this role that constitutes the concept of the implied reader.”⁹⁶

The implied reader’s responses to a text are not capricious; they are prestructured by the author, who decides which aspects of the narrative remain unresolved. The indeterminate “spurs the reader into action,” while the determinate controls this action.⁹⁷ The author who achieves a balance between the two invites the reader to explore the tacit portions of the narrative in such a way that the entire work is affected: “The explicit in its

⁹⁴ Idem, *Act of Reading*, 34. Iser’s implied reader is an expansion of an eponymous reader introduced by Booth (in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* [2d ed.; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983], 155).

⁹⁵ Iser, *Implied Reader*, xii. As a type of hypothetical reader, the implied reader is “a construct ... in no way to be identified with any real reader” (idem, *Act of Reading*, 34).

⁹⁶ Ibid., 34-35. Iser cites Booth to this end: “The author creates, in short, an image of himself and another image of his reader; he makes his reader, as he makes his second self, as the most successful reading is one in which the created selves ... can find complete agreement” (*Implied Reader*, 30; Booth, *Rhetoric*, 138).

⁹⁷ Iser, *Implied Reader*, 32; idem, *Prospecting*, 34. Overly determinate texts are often tedious, inviting minimal participation from the reader. The same may be said for texts that are overly *indeterminate*, as these require their readers to construct the majority of the narrative *ex nihilo* (“Indeterminacy,” 14).

turn is transformed when the implicit has been brought to light.” The world of the narrative unfolds and, to a certain extent, is recreated in the mind of the implied reader.⁹⁸

Fish suspects Iser of attempting to accommodate both author and reader by privileging neither. And the judiciousness of his theory, according to Fish, is simultaneously its weakest link.⁹⁹ In his attempt to pay heed to authorial intent via the distinction between the determinate and the indeterminate, Fish accuses Iser of basing his theory on the assumption that there exist givens prior to the act of reading. Fish insists, by contrast, that “there can be no category of the ‘given’ if by given one means what is there before interpretation begins.”¹⁰⁰ Fish and Iser agree that the reading process is as much about the reader’s response to a text as it is about the text itself.¹⁰¹ They differ insofar as Fish privileges the reader’s mind as the unique locale of meaning production.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Idem, *Prospecting*, 34. Meaning, therefore, does not exist in an objective sense, but rather it “materializes” in the reading process (idem, *Implied Reader*, 32).

⁹⁹ So Fish: “His theory is mounted on behalf of the reader, but it honors the intentions of the authors ... literature is freed from the tyranny of referential meaning, but nevertheless contains a meaning in the directions that trigger the reader’s activities; those activities are determined by a reader’s “stock of experience,” but in the course of their unfolding, that stock is transformed. The theory, in short, has something for everyone, and denies legitimacy to no one” (“Why No One’s Afraid of Wolfgang Iser,” *Diacritics* 11 [1981]: 6).

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 8. Iser responds: “True, there is no unmediated given, but interpretation would be useless if it were not meant to open access to something we encounter. Interpretation is always informed by a set of assumptions or conventions, but these are also acted upon by what they intend to tackle. Hence the ‘something’ which is to be mediated exists prior to interpretation, acts as a constraint on interpretation, has repercussions on the anticipations operative in interpretation, and thus contributes to a hermeneutical process, the result of which is both a mediated given and a reshuffling of the initial assumptions” (“Talk like Whales: A Reply to Stanley Fish,” *Diacritics* 11 [1981]: 84).

¹⁰¹ So Fish: “Reading is an activity, something *you do* ... no one would argue that the act of reading can take place in the absence of someone who reads.” (“Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics,” *NLH* 2 [1970]: 123); repr. in *Is There a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 22.

¹⁰² So idem, “Literature in the Reader,” 134.

1.3.2.2. Stanley Fish's Informed Reader

In Fish's view, texts do not have meaning in an objective sense; this would imply that a meaning could exist outside of the reader's interpretation. And while they do not cease to exist in the absence of a reader, their static appearance conceals their dynamism: "Literature is a kinetic art, but the physical form it assumes prevents us from seeing its essential nature, even though we so experience it."¹⁰³ The question for Fish is less with what a text *means* and more with what it *does*. The reader's experience of a text is in fact tantamount to its meaning.¹⁰⁴ He employs a passage from Sir Thomas Browne as an illustration:

That Judas perished by hanging himself, there is no certainty in Scripture: though in one place it seems to affirm it, and by a doubtful word hath given occasion to translate it; yet in another place, in a more punctual description, it maketh it improbable, and seems to overthrow it.¹⁰⁵

Fish posits that this sentence is characterized by a particular "strategy ... of progressive decertaintizing." The first clause, an assertion ("that Judas perished by hanging himself"), prompts the reader to agree and to then anticipate what comes next. Several possibilities arise:

That Judas perished ... *is* (an example for us all).
That Judas perished ... *shows* (how conscious he was of the enormity of his sin).
That Judas perished ... *should* (give us pause).

What follows ("there is no") narrows the possibilities: the reader, still accepting the validity of the initial assertion, is inclined to anticipate "doubt," but instead finds "certainty." The

¹⁰³ Ibid., 140.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 125, 131.

¹⁰⁵ Browne, *Religio Medici* (8th ed.; London: Scot, Basset, Wright, and Chiswell, 1682), 226.

reader's expectations are frustrated and revised by the text's operation, as "the status of the fact that had served as [the reader's] point of reference becomes *uncertain*."¹⁰⁶ This process is cyclical, and by it the reader creates sense, and therefore "meaning," out of the text.

Fish dubs the reader on whom the text operates the *informed reader*, a combination of real and constructed reader: "a hybrid—a real reader (me) who does everything within his power to make himself informed."¹⁰⁷ Three characteristics define the informed reader: first, he or she "is a competent speaker of the language out of which the text is built up"; second, the informed reader brings to the task of comprehension "the knowledge ... of lexical sets, collocation probabilities, idioms, professional and other dialects, etc."; and third, he or she "has *literary* competence."¹⁰⁸ Fish's methodology, "affective stylistics," aims to give full account of the informed reader "as an actively mediating presence," and it therefore focuses on what he calls the " 'psychological effects' of the utterance."¹⁰⁹ He argues that "the critic has the responsibility of becoming not one but a number of informed readers, each of whom will be identified by a matrix of political, cultural, and literary determinants."¹¹⁰

Fish considers his own reading experience as normative, especially in his early work. That is, he sees himself as *the* paragon of the informed reader.¹¹¹ In subsequent work, he develops the notion of *interpretive communities*, which are populated by "those who share interpretive strategies not for reading ... but for writing texts, for constituting their

¹⁰⁶ Fish, "Literature in the Reader," 124.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 145.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 123.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 146.

¹¹¹ Fish acknowledges as much in *Is There a Text*, 8.

properties and assigning their intentions.”¹¹² These communities provide for Fish what the artistic pole affords Iser: a measure of stability in the interpretive process. Because the strategies dictated by an interpretive community precede the act of reading, they determine the shape (but not the meaning) of a particular text before it is read.¹¹³

1.3.2.3. Umberto Eco's Model Reader

Similar to Fish and Iser, Eco holds that the act of reading requires the creative faculties of the reader. As “open” works of art, literary texts demand a reader’s participation for them to be actualized. In short, the reader is a “fundamental ingredient” of every story.¹¹⁴ While Eco sees authors as relinquishing some control of their intended meaning when they put pen to paper, he does not conceive of their texts as existing in what he calls “a vacuum of a potentially infinite range of possible interpretations.” He assumes that it is possible to arrive at an agreement of what texts encourage and discourage, and his theory is therefore an attempt to chart a *via media* between two instances of “epistemological fanaticism”: authorial intention and infinite meaning.¹¹⁵

Eco compares the act of reading to a person (the reader) walking in the woods (the narrative). And according to Eco, there are two ways of taking such a walk. The first is to

¹¹² Ibid., 171; idem, “Interpreting the ‘Variorum,’” *CI* 2 (1976): 483.

¹¹³ Augustine’s use of the *regula fidei* in his *De doctrina christiana* serves as an example: that “everything in the Scriptures, and indeed in the world when it is properly read, points to ... God’s love for us and our answering responsibility to love our fellow creatures for His own sake.” This, according to Fish, is “both a stipulation of what meaning there is and a set of directions for finding it” (“Interpreting,” 483).

¹¹⁴ Eco, *Six Walks*, 1.

¹¹⁵ Idem, *Limits*, 1-7, 24.

examine one or several paths in order to determine the most prudent way out. The second is to explore all paths in an effort to discern “why some ... are accessible and others are not.”¹¹⁶ The first reader (walker) approaches a narrative with an eye toward the end: he or she intends to finish the story, having discovered what it is “about,” and then leave it behind. The second is not necessarily interested in ever “finishing” the story; he or she enters the woods in order to “linger,” to discover what they are like, “to get lost just for the hell of it.”¹¹⁷ In doing so, the empirical reader gradually discovers the identity of the *model reader* and attempts to embody it. This, for Eco, is the primary task of interpretation.¹¹⁸

A text is a device designed both to anticipate and to create its model reader.¹¹⁹ In order for it to be communicative, its author must imagine a reader able to understand the signals that he or she generates.¹²⁰ Authors anticipate their model readers via the selection of a specific linguistic code. Or they may appeal directly to a specific type of reader. “Once upon a time ...,” for example, discloses to the reader that what follows is intended for children or, at least, that it is fiction.¹²¹ Lastly, an author may anticipate the model reader by

¹¹⁶ Idem, *Six Walks*, 27.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 50.

¹¹⁸ Eco conceives of his model reader as similar to Iser’s implied reader (ibid., 15-16).

¹¹⁹ Eco, *Limits*, 58-59; idem, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 66. Eco often refers to texts “doing” things that would normally be attributed to authors. He does not deny that texts are the products of authors, but texts themselves are the primary foci (*Six Walks*, 11). While I uphold the importance of the author, I at times adopt his way of speaking to maintain the clarity of his theory.

¹²⁰ Idem, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (AdvSem; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 7.

¹²¹ In either case, the model reader anticipated by “Once upon a time” is open to what Samuel Taylor Coleridge calls the “suspension of disbelief,” a willingness to accept (temporarily) the terms of the author’s created world (*Biographia Literaria: or, Biographical Sketches of my Literary Life and Opinions* [2 vols.; London: Best Penner, 1817], 2:2; as noted in Eco, *Six Walks*, 75-78; see also idem,

presuming a certain degree of “encyclopedic competence,” or knowledge of the socio-linguistic culture in which the text was penned. This final point is complex, as texts do more than *anticipate* the encyclopedic competence of their readers; they also *generate* it.

Eco illustrates the concept of generation with a passage from Sir Walter Scott’s *Waverley*: “What could my readers have expected from the chivalrous epithets of Howard, Mordaunt, Mortimer or Stanley, or from the softer and more sentimental sounds of Belmore, Belville, Belfield and Belgrave, but pages of inanity, similar to those which have been so christened for half a century past?”¹²² In this passage Scott anticipates a reader able to apprehend his allusions, a reader “nourished on a whole chapter of intertextual encyclopaedia.”¹²³ The passage generates the reader’s encyclopedic competence by indicating the knowledge requisite for fuller participation.¹²⁴ In contrast to Iser’s notion that the reader supplements the gaps present in a literary text, “completing” the work, for Eco the inverse is actually the case: literary texts are themselves responsible for filling gaps that might exist in the reader’s knowledge. Put another way, texts form the readers that they presuppose.

Role of the Reader, 19).

¹²² Scott, *Waverley; or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since* (3 vols.; 3d ed.; Edinburgh: James Ballantyne, 1814), 1:4. Cited in Eco, *Role of the Reader*, 7.

¹²³ Ibid. While lack of encyclopedic competence does not stop the reader from making sense of the passage, it does prevent him or her from participating fully in the narrative.

¹²⁴ So Eco: “After having read the passage, whoever approaches *Waverley* ... is asked to *assume* that certain epithets are meaning ‘chivalry’ and that there is a whole tradition of chivalric romances displaying certain deprecatory stylistic and narrative properties” (ibid.).

1.3.3. Determining the Identity of the Reader

The theories of Iser, Fish, and Eco, while distinct, share two essential commonalities. First, their readers are constructs, so they allow for the positing of a reader whose historical existence is possible but not required. Second, for each the act of reading is a process that requires the reader's participation. Iser's implied reader participates in the author's created reality by "filling in" portions of the narrative, while Fish's informed reader is drawn by the text into a process that continually frustrates and revises his or her expectations. And Eco's model reader, by exploring the author's text, is subsequently formed and reformed by it.

Iser's theory resists the compartmentalization of meaning into either text or reader: texts are imbued by their authors with *potential meaning* that is only actualized in the process of reading, and so interpretation necessitates analysis of the text and the reader's response to it. The chief contribution of Fish's affective stylistics is the informed reader's mandate to read slowly and intentionally, anticipating the author's next move while simultaneously preparing to be surprised. Although he would seem to grant the reader hermeneutical *carte blanche* in shifting the location of meaning production from somewhere between text and reader to the reader alone, Fish's progression toward interpretive communities nonetheless evidences an almost intrinsic need to anchor the reader's response to some objective standard.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ The stability provided by the interpretive community is not permanent; one may always transfer membership between communities. Yet the notion of interpretive communities serves as a reminder that ways of reading are not arbitrary but are learned and practiced by others.

The fundamental insight of Eco's theory is that texts form and enhance the encyclopedic competences of their readers. A related component, the text's "cultural encyclopedia," or the socio-linguistic complex in which the act of reading occurs, is equally important. I introduce this concept in the final section, as it helps the interpreter define the reader's "intertextual canon," the range of possible interlocutors that the text resonates with in the act of reading.

1.4. Defining the Intertextual Canon

In his 1961 presidential address to the Society of Biblical Literature, Samuel Sandmel warned against the dangers of "parallelomania," defined as "that extravagance among scholars which first overdoes the supposed similarity in passages and then proceeds to describe source and derivation as if implying literary connection flowing in an inevitable or predetermined direction."¹²⁶ Because it is concerned less with the way that one text incorporates another and more with how texts resonate in the act of reading, intertextual methodology escapes the problem of erroneously positing literary dependence. But in place of this problem another arises: the delineation of an "intertextual canon."

Canonical boundaries vary with the critic and his or her interpretive goals.¹²⁷

Intertextual "purists" may judge the idea of a canon (biblical or otherwise) to be contrived and therefore irrelevant. In this case, the (non-)canon becomes infinitely broad, and all texts

¹²⁶ Sandmel, "Parallelomania," *JBL* 81 (1962): 1-3. Although directed toward scholarly misappropriations of the (then recently discovered) Dead Sea Scrolls, Sandmel's warning remains apropos.

¹²⁷ So Hays, *Echoes*, 15. In author-centric exegesis, they are determined by the sources that an author employs in writing, so that texts unknown to the author are of less interest than those with which the author shows familiarity.

become capable of generating intertextual resonance.¹²⁸ A critic may also limit the canon to a preselected corpus. In studies pertaining to biblical texts, the task can be relatively simple, as the intertextual canon may be simply conflated with the biblical canon, however conceived. Such analyses certainly have the capacity to yield results, but they are problematic for at least three reasons. First, they assume falsely that the canons of ancient Christian readers are limited to texts included (or that would later be included) in the Christian Bible. Second, to read any text in light of a predefined canon is to front-load interpretation of it, to imply that the exegete possesses foreknowledge about what he or she will find in the act of reading. Finally, a predefined canon prevents the interpreter from discerning intertextual phenomena outside the bounds of the preselected corpus.

1.4.1. Discovering the Cultural Encyclopedia

Eco's cultural encyclopedia allows the interpreter to speak of the reader's intertextual canon as simultaneously fixed and continually in flux. Alkier conceives of it as "the cultural framework in which the text is situated and from which the gaps of the text are filled."¹²⁹ It provides what Alter dubs "the grid of convention upon which, and against which, the individual work operates."¹³⁰ Eco defines it as a labyrinth, of which there are three varieties: linear, maze, and net. The first is not particularly complex, as it is impossible for one to get

¹²⁸ This leads to what Ulrich Luz calls "an unlimited widening of meaning" ("Intertexts in the Gospel of Matthew," *HTR* 97 [2004]: 122), producing results that, while perhaps intriguing, are ultimately anachronistic.

¹²⁹ Alkier, "Intertextuality," 8. On "gaps," Alkier is anticipated by Sternberg, *Poetics*, esp. 186-229.

¹³⁰ Alter, *Art*, 55.

lost in it: there is one path, and that path leads to the destination.¹³¹ In a maze, there is one “correct” path, but it is concealed among others that result in dead ends. It is possible, even expected, for one to become disoriented in a maze, to learn from mistakes and to thereby reach the end.¹³²

The third type of labyrinth, of which the cultural encyclopedia is illustrative, is distinct from the previous two in that it lacks a destination. Eco compares it to a *rhizome*, a complex tangle of interconnected roots, where “every point ... can and must be connected with every other point.” The one who enters this labyrinth does so with the goal of making and exploring connections between its various points, and in doing so he or she creates new paths by which to navigate the complex. The process of navigating a rhizometric labyrinth is gradual and unpredictable: “At every node of it no one can have the global vision of all its possibilities but only the local vision of the closest ones: every local description of the net is a *hypothesis*, subject to falsification, about its further course; in a rhizome blindness is the only way of seeing (locally), and thinking means to *grope one’s way*.”¹³³

The encyclopedia contains all aspects of a culture, regardless of truth or medium: “[It] does not register only the ‘historical’ truth that Napoleon died on Saint Helena but also the ‘literary’ truth that Juliet died in Verona.”¹³⁴ By virtue of its interconnectedness, it is an

¹³¹ The labyrinth of King Minos, according to Eco, was a linear labyrinth: “Theseus entering the labyrinth of Crete had no choices to make: he could not but reach the center, and from the center the way out. That is the reason by which at the center there was the Minotaur, to make the whole thing a little more exciting” (*Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* [AdvSem; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984], 80).

¹³² So Eco: “A maze does not need a Minotaur: it is its own Minotaur” (ibid., 81).

¹³³ Ibid., 82 (emphasis original).

¹³⁴ Ibid., 82-83. Similarly Huizenga: “The encyclopedia ... registers all pieces of cultural knowledge: codes, rules, conventions, history, literature, truth claims, discourses, all the units that

“unlimited territory” capable of generating an almost infinite range of interpretations.¹³⁵ As a device “for blowing up or narcotizing pieces of encyclopedic information,” a text is its author’s own interpretation of the encyclopedia, his or her own journey through the labyrinth.¹³⁶ In Huizenga’s words, “a text is a limited actualization of the encyclopedic possibilities ... the encyclopedia is potential, the text actual. The encyclopedia is unlimited, the text limits. The text directs the Model Reader through the rhizome of the encyclopedia on a particular intended path.”¹³⁷

As the reader is led through the encyclopedia, he or she is free to deviate from the prescribed path, to explore the terrain bordering the author’s route. These “inferential walks” are elicited by the text in conjunction with the reader, and they are at the heart of the idea that the reader’s participation actualizes the narrative as a work of art. Texts, according to Eco, are experienced slowly, “step by step,” and the reading process consists in the reader’s perpetual advancing of “forecasts” about the progression of the narrative.¹³⁸ Activated by the reader’s own experiences and encyclopedic competence, forecasts provide the “intertextual frames” through which the reader encounters the narrative. On an inferential walk, the reader explores these frames in search of evidence to support his or her

culture comprises; everything” (*New Isaac*, 27). Eco’s encyclopedia is similar to Iser’s cultural repertoire: “The repertoire consists of all the familiar territory within the text. This may be in the form of references to earlier works, or to social and historical norms, or to the whole culture from which the text has emerged” (“The Reality of Fiction: A Functionalist Approach to Literature,” *NLH* 7 [1975]: 21).

¹³⁵ Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, 81.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 80; idem, *Role of the Reader*, 23.

¹³⁷ Huizenga, *New Isaac*, 29.

¹³⁸ Eco, *Role of the Reader*, 31-32

hypotheses.¹³⁹ The question of a frame's validity is ultimately answered by the text itself: "The end of the text not only confirms or contradicts the last forecasts, but also authenticates or inauthenticates the whole system of long-distance hypotheses hazarded by the reader."¹⁴⁰

The cultural encyclopedia provides a starting point from which to articulate the intertextual canon. While the number of possible connections in the encyclopedia is unlimited, the encyclopedia *itself* is not: because it encapsulates the knowledge of a culture existing during a specific period in history, it is bound by certain parameters. Though vast, even edging toward infinite, it is nonetheless constrained by its historical situatedness, and so it assists the interpreter in setting the initial boundaries of the canon. By following the path provided by the author, the interpreter learns which parts of the encyclopedia are familiar to the author and the author's strategy for navigating it. Armed with this knowledge, he or she is then free to explore alternate routes.

The interpreter who chooses to veer from the author's path does so not to leave the text behind, but to view it from a different vantage point. Yet because of the serpentine nature of the encyclopedia, it is perhaps too easy to get lost, to create paths through the labyrinth far removed from that of the author. Hays's criteria for the detection of echoes allow the interpreter to explore the encyclopedia while ensuring that he or she does not

¹³⁹ That is, the reader considers the narrative from the perspective of "analogous 'topoi,' themes, or motives" in an effort to determine which are relevant and which are not (ibid., 32).

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. Because the goal of interpretation is to discover what the "woods" are like, paths that are found to lead out of the woods permanently will be of less interest than those that allow the interpreter to linger. With respect to those paths that encourage lingering, it is reasonable to acknowledge that there are many ways of walking in the woods while admitting that some are more accessible than others.

venture too far from the author, and in this way, they aid in the task of refining the reader's intertextual canon.

1.4.2. Criteria for the Detection of Echoes

In his influential *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, Hays aims to show how Paul's echoing of Israel's Scriptures intensifies his rhetoric. He comments on the complexity inherent in studying ancient texts from this perspective:

As we move farther away from overt citation, the source recedes into the discursive distance, the intertextual relations become less determinate, and the demand placed on the reader's listening power grows greater. As we near the vanishing point of the echo, it inevitably becomes difficult to decide whether we are really hearing an echo at all, or whether we are only conjuring things out of the murmurings of our own imaginations.¹⁴¹

The difficulty is not limited to whether an echo is intended by the author, as Hays asserts that "texts can generate new readings that transcend the conscious intention of the author and the hermeneutical strictures we promulgate."¹⁴² Rather, the question is whether the modern interpreter is capable of reproducing the intertextual canon of the ancient reader, and whether he or she is able to perceive, in a manner befitting that reader, echoes between that canon and the Pauline corpus.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Hays, *Echoes*, 23.

¹⁴² Ibid., 33.

¹⁴³ While the language of "intertextual canon" is my own, not Hays's, my phrasing of the question is consonant with his study: "Since Paul's audience is known to us only hypothetically, it is hard to speak confidently about their capacity to recognize Paul's evocations of scriptural language" (ibid.).

One of Hays's most significant contributions in *Echoes* (or at least one of the more frequently quoted) is his development of criteria "for testing claims about the presence and meaning of scriptural echoes in Paul."¹⁴⁴ They are as follows:

1. Availability — Was the proposed source of the echo available to the author?
2. Volume — What is the degree of explicit repetition of words?
3. Recurrence — How often is the source of the echo cited elsewhere?
4. Thematic Coherence — How well does the echo fit the text's line of argument?
5. Historical Plausibility — Could the author have intended this meaning?
6. History of Interpretation — Has this echo been "heard" by others?
7. Satisfaction — Does the echo cohere with what we already know the text is about?¹⁴⁵

Brawley notes the importance of these criteria as helping to guard against "capricious" interpretations, but he suggests that the restriction of the volume criterion to the degree of verbal correlation between texts needs expanding: "Allusions may also replicate the form, genre, setting, and plot of their precursor."¹⁴⁶ Brawley's augmentation of the criterion grants the interpreter license to explore in greater depth those echoes that begin as little more than intuitions. The others continue to operate as Hays intends, confirming or denying whether these intuitions are in fact "authentic" echoes.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 29.

¹⁴⁵ Outlined in *ibid.*, 29-32; expanded in *idem*, *Conversion*, 34-45.

¹⁴⁶ Brawley, "Canon and Community," 422. A correlation between Luke 4:4 and Deut 8:3e ("but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord") serves as an illustration. In keeping with Hays's understanding of volume, Luke 4:4 does *not* echo Deut 8:3e because there exists no explicit repetition of words. But the volume of the echo is "conspicuously high" in terms of both plot and setting: "Jesus' actions in the desert carry out precisely what Deut 8:3e says—he refuses to live by the option that the devil offers and chooses to live by words that come from the mouth of God" (*ibid.*, 425).

Hays's criteria are likewise useful in determining the contents of the reader's intertextual canon. The first, availability, assists in the initial demarcation of boundaries, and in this respect, it is the functional equivalent to Eco's cultural encyclopedia. A source may be deemed "unavailable" if its composition postdates that of the text being considered, if its provenance makes it wholly unlikely that a reader could have encountered it, or if it exists only in a language foreign to the reader. The first and second stipulations are reasonably straightforward: it is impossible for a reader to find intertextual resonances with a text that does not exist or that exists in a location inaccessible to him or her. The third is more complex, as it depends on the knowledge of the reader but not necessarily the author. If we accept Brawley's hypothesis, that intertextual echoing may occur on extra-verbal planes, then it is possible for a reader to hear echoes between texts written in tongues unknown by the author. The intertextual canon of PJ's hypothetical reader is therefore unwieldy at the outset, encompassing all texts circulating in the Mediterranean by the end of the second century.

The remaining criteria aid the interpreter in mapping with greater precision the literary corpus of the text's model reader, reducing the size of the intertextual canon to a more realistic size. The criterion of recurrence will be of less value to the present study. In Hays's own work, it prompts the interpreter to discern whether Paul alludes to a certain text in multiple works. As PJ is (presumably) the only extant work by its author, there are no other works to compare it to. Likewise, because of PJ's troubled history, access to how it was interpreted in antiquity is limited. Fulfilling the history of interpretation criterion will therefore necessitate a degree of creativity. Certain patristic homilies and treatises on the nativity of Jesus and the person of Mary show an awareness of some traditions in PJ and, as the text exercised enormous influence on art and iconography from antiquity until the

present, various artistic depictions of events in PJ may likewise shed light on its reception history.

Hays admits that the criterion of satisfaction is often the most significant in determining the authenticity of an echo: “It is in fact another way of asking whether the proposed reading offers a good account of the experience of a contemporary community of competent readers.”¹⁴⁷ In the following section, I address this criterion alongside Eco’s understanding of the literal sense to address the relationship between intertextual echoes and the author’s intention.

1.4.3. Intertexts, Layering, and the Literal Sense

Hays introduces the criterion of satisfaction with a series of questions: “With or without clear confirmation from the other criteria listed here, does the proposed reading make sense? Does it illuminate the surrounding discourse? Does it produce for the reader a satisfying account of the effect of the intertextual relation?” In other words, is the proposed reading a “good reading”?¹⁴⁸ It is difficult to articulate this criterion without committing the so-called affective fallacy, defined by William K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley as “confusion between the poem and its *results* (what it *is* and what it *does*).”¹⁴⁹ That is, how might one maintain the centrality of this criterion without simultaneously claiming that a text’s meaning is determined *solely* on the basis of the reader’s response to it?

¹⁴⁷ Hays, *Echoes*, 31-32.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 31; Wimsatt and Beardsley, “The Affective Fallacy,” in *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (ed. W. K. Wimsatt; Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1954), 21.

In subsequent development of the criteria, Hays expands his earlier definition: “[Satisfaction] calls for an integrative act of discernment about the meaning of the epistle as a whole, or at least the meaning of the local context within the epistle, in light of the proposed intertexts.”¹⁵⁰ This later definition makes explicit a point only latent in *Echoes*, that a basic understanding of Paul is not contingent upon the ability to “hear” echoes. But Hays’s understanding of satisfaction implies that the reader’s ability to discern echoes and intertexts *can* contribute to a *fuller* understanding of that meaning.

It may be the case that an author of a literary text will allude to another intentionally and that a reader’s ability to understand that text hinges on his or her capacity to perceive the reference. But while the encoding of meaning in the guise of allusion entails a conscious decision on the part of the author, the same is not true for echoes and intertexts that, by definition, do not depend on the author’s intention. A failure to hear these echoes does not preclude comprehension of the author’s meaning, but the ability to do so allows the reader to add new layers to that meaning.

The concept of *layers* and *layering* is similar in many ways to the fourfold sense of Scripture (the *Quadrigena*), an allegorical way of reading developed by Origen (in *De principiis* 4) but used frequently by later patristic and medieval exegetes. The historical (or literal) sense is the meaning most clearly conveyed by the language used in a passage. It can be gained through conventional methods of reading and is available to all. While Origen would not have conceived of it in these terms, the historical sense coincides most closely with the meaning that the author intends to convey. The others (allegorical, tropological, anagogical) arise when a reader takes a component of this basic meaning and connects it with something

¹⁵⁰ Hays, *Conversion*, 44.

else: other word, texts, themes, concepts, etc. But these “spiritual senses” are not independent of the historical sense. As Denis Farkasfalvy observes, “The letter and its innerworldly meaning ... serve as sign and symbol, making the spiritual content manifest and accessible to the flesh ... The sign cannot fully and adequately represent what it signifies, yet it nonetheless transfers to the level of the corporeal senses meanings of a higher order.”¹⁵¹ Understanding the historical sense, then, is a necessary step toward understanding whatever additional layers of meaning the text may have.

All of this presupposes that texts have meaning and that it is possible to comprehend it without recourse to intertextuality. Eco argues in this regard that “in order to extrapolate from [a text] any possible sense, one is first of all obliged to recognize that it has a literal sense,” and that, in conformity with its code, it “means what it intuitively means.”¹⁵² The literal sense, for Eco, is an acknowledgment that a text’s language constrains its meaning, and that there are limits to what it can and cannot convey.¹⁵³ It does not *determine* the meaning of the text, but it serves as a benchmark to judge the reader’s interpretation by. There is no standard by which to label an interpretation as “good,” but “it is still possible to decide, on the basis of context, which one is due, not to an effort of understanding ‘that’ text, but rather to a hallucinatory response on the part of the addressee.”¹⁵⁴ This methodology thus comes full circle to Hirsch and his mandate to seek first the meaning of the author. The quest remains tentative, culminating in probability rather than certainty, but

¹⁵¹ Farkasfalvy, *Inspiration & Interpretation: A Theological Introduction to Sacred Scripture* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 128.

¹⁵² Eco, *Limits*, 54.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

it is likewise essential, as the author's meaning helps rule out interpretations that would transcend the boundaries of what the text will allow.

1.5. Conclusion

I began this chapter by noting some of the challenges that intertextual methodology poses to more conventional, historical-critical exegesis. But I have insisted that the two need not be construed as mutually exclusive, and that it is possible to achieve a synthesis whereby they might complement one another. I have argued that the reader, in cooperation with the author, is an active participant in the process of reading; by forming and exploring correlations between his or her own intertextual canon and the author's text, the reader layers the meaning of the text, possibly in ways its author did not necessarily intend or even foresee. Defining the reader's intertextual canon is admittedly a complex and amorphous task. Eco's cultural encyclopedia fixes its initial boundaries to include all cultural knowledge that would have been theoretically accessible to the ancient reader. Coupled with Hays's criteria, the text as one route through the encyclopedia allows for a gradual sharpening of parameters.

Chapters Three through Five (below) are practical demonstrations of this methodology. Each is devoted to a particular episode in PJ, and each articulates the ways in which intertextual phenomena layer the meaning of the author. The following chapter, by way of transition, is an overview of some ways that PJ has been read and understood by prominent readers in the past.

CHAPTER 2 – THE *PROTEVANGELIUM OF JAMES*: A HISTORY OF READINGS

The incredibly bad taste of the second century illustrates to us, in its attempt to manufacture documentary proof of the virgin birth, how worthless would be even the most ancient and authentic of documents as proof of the supernatural.

Benjamin Bacon et al.¹

PJ is an influential apocryphal narrative with a complicated past. The earliest extant life of the Virgin, it is the source of numerous pieces of Marian knowledge, popular and doctrinal, including the names of her parents, her miraculous conception, and her status as virgin before and after the birth of Jesus. The circumstances of its composition are largely mysterious. On the one hand, it is clear that it is a product of curiosity: Mary's appearances in the canonical gospels are little more than vignettes, so questions about her character arise naturally. By situating the story of Mary in the context of the more familiar account of Jesus' birth, its author provides a sort of supplement to the canonical narratives. On the other hand, certain aspects of the narrative betray an apologetic, even polemical tone, which suggests that the author may have written in order to counter instances of second-century anti-Marian libel.

In this chapter I review the history of scholarship on PJ. I begin in the sixteenth century, when a series of events culminated in the "reintroduction" of the text into western consciousness. Before addressing issues related to its MS tradition, provenance, date, literary unity, and structure, I provide a brief overview of its contents and a means for dividing

¹ Bacon et al., "The Supernatural Birth of Jesus," *AJT* 10 (1906): 3.

them. I conclude with the question of the text's genre and its relationship to the NT, and by situating the present study within a new approach to Christian apocryphal literature that emphasizes the value of apocryphal narratives as examples of early Christian exegesis. I suggest that this approach can benefit from examining not only how these texts are read, but also how they may affect their readers' understanding of other texts.

2.1. The "Rediscovery" of PJ

It is a common trope that PJ was rediscovered in the sixteenth century by the French Humanist Guillaume Postel, who acquired a Greek manuscript of the text during a trip to Constantinople in 1551.² It did fall out of circulation in the West, and its condemnation by Jerome and the Gelasian Decree was so effective that few ancient Latin MSS of the text survive. But it never lost favor in the East. Instead, it circulated widely, each copy seeming to have its own unique title.³

² William J. Bouwsma, *Concordia Mundi: The Career and Thought of Guillaume Postel, 1510-1581* (HHM 33; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), 36-37; also Albert Frey, "Protévangile de Jacques," in *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens* (eds. François Bovon et al.; 2 vols. Paris: Gallimard, 1997-2005), 1:73.

³ John Painter argues that "Jerome rejected [PJ] because it portrayed the brothers (and sisters) of Jesus as children of Joseph by a marriage prior to his marriage to Mary" (*Just James: The Brother of Jesus in History and Tradition* [SPNT; 2d ed.; Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004], 198). Paul Foster calls the perpetual virginity of Joseph a "theological novelty of the fourth century" ("The Protevangelium of James," *ExpTim* 118 [2007]: 577). On this topic, see Jerome, *De perpetua virginitate beatae Mariae, adversus Helvidium* [PL 23.181-206]; Innocent I, *Letter 6 to Exuperius of Toulouse* 7.30. Jerome's distaste for apocryphal writings in general is seen clearly in his instructions to a certain Laeta on how to raise her daughter: "Let her avoid all apocryphal writings, and if she is led to read such not by the truth of the doctrines which they contain but out of respect for the miracles contained in them; let her understand that they are not really written by those to whom they are ascribed, that many faulty elements have been introduced into them, and that it requires infinite discretion to look for gold in the midst of dirt" (*Epist.* [ad Laeta] 107.12). The Gelasian Decree (ca. 500) lists a number of works that may refer to PJ (*Evangelium nomine Iacobi minoris; Liber de infantia salvatoris; Liber de nativitate salvatoris et de Maria vel obstetrice*). And on the irony of the text's condemnation, Lily Vuong: "The so-called Gelasian Decree is a sixth-century forgery ... that

When Postel translated the text into Latin, he gave it the title, *Protevangelion, sive de natalibus Jesu Christi et ipsius matris virginis Mariae, sermo historicus divi Jacobi minoris* (*Proto-Gospel, or on the Birth of Jesus Christ and His Virgin Mother Mary: A Historical Discussion of the Divine James the Less*). Theodor Bibliander published his translation in 1552.⁴ He and Postel believed it to be the original prologue to the Gospel of Mark, and the text of their 1552 edition is followed by a Latin translation of Mark (pp. 55-128), a “Life of Mark” (pp. 128-164), and a lengthy verbal index of the second gospel (pp. 165-410).⁵

David R. Cartlidge and J. K. Elliott argue that “it would be difficult to find any image of the Virgin which has not been affected by the iconic version of the *Protevangelium* and its sister documents.”⁶ The text served as a source for numerous later works, including the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, *The Gospel of the Nativity of Mary*, *The Arabic and Armenian Gospels of the Infancy*, various English and Irish Infancy Gospels (*Arundel 404*, *Liber Flavus Fergusiorum*, *Lebhear Breac*), the *Liber Requitei Mariae*, Maximus the Confessor’s *Life of the*

claims to have been penned by Gelasius, bishop of Rome in 492-96 C.E. In other words, this text that condemns apocrypha is itself apocryphal” (*Gender and Purity in the Protevangelium of James* [WUNT2; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013], 12). In Papyrus Bodmer V alone the text is called Γένεσις Μαρίας Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰακώβ. Boyd Lee Daniels gives close to seventy titles in “The Greek Manuscript Tradition of the Protevangelium Jacobi” (PhD diss., Duke University, 1956), 2-6, and George T. Zervos provides more than thirty others in “Prolegomena to a Critical Edition of the Genesis Marias (Protevangelium Jacobi): The Greek Manuscripts” (PhD diss., Duke University, 1986), 2-4.

⁴ Bibliander, *Protevangelion sive de natalibus Jesu Christi et ipsius matris virginis Mariae, sermo historicus divi Jacobi minoris, consobrini et fratris Domini Jesu, apostoli primarii, et episcopi Christianorum primi Hierosolymis* (Basil: Oporin, 1552).

⁵ Subsequent scholarship has shown that Mark is perhaps the only canonical gospel that the author of PJ is *not* familiar with (so Édouard Massaux, *The Influence of the Gospel of Saint Matthew on Christian Literature before Saint Irenaeus* [NGS 5; trans. Norman J. Belvel and Suzanne Hecht; 3 vols.; Macon: Mercer University Press], 1:236).

⁶ Cartlidge and Elliott, *Art and the Christian Apocrypha* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 41; also Frey, “Protévangelie de Jacques,” 74-75.

Virgin, and possibly the *Qur'an*.⁷ Its impact on art and iconography, whether direct or through the sources mentioned, also cannot be overestimated. Additionally, many of the more than one hundred and forty extant Greek manuscripts of PJ (not to mention those in Coptic, Syriac, Armenian, Georgian, Ethiopic, Arabic, and Latin) are liturgical, evidence that the text was in some cases a regular part of Christian worship.⁸ It is therefore not fully

⁷ Discussion of PJ and the *Qur'an* in Cornelia B. Horn, "Intersections: The Reception History of the Protoevangelium of James in Sources from the Christian East and the Qur'an," *Apocrypha* 17 (2006): 113-50; idem, "Mary between Bible and Qur'an: Soundings into the Transmission and Reception History of the Protoevangelium of James on the Basis of Selected Literary Sources in Coptic and Copto-Arabic and of Art-Historical Evidence Pertaining to Egypt," *ICMR* 18 (2007): 509-38; idem, "Syriac and Arabic Perspectives on Structural and Motif Parallels Regarding Jesus' Childhood in Christian Apocrypha and Early Islamic Literature: The 'Book of Mary,' the Arabic Apocryphal Gospel of John, and the Qur'an," *Apocrypha* 19 (2008): 267-91. Discussion of *Liber Requitei Mariae* in Stephen J. Shoemaker, "'Let Us Go and Burn Her Body': The Image of the Jews in the Early Dormition Traditions," *CH* 68 (1999): 775-823; idem, *Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary's Dormition and Assumption* (OECs; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); idem, "The Virgin Mary in the Ministry of Jesus and the Early Church According to the Earliest Life of the Virgin," *HTR* 98 (2005): 441-67. Discussion of *The Arabic and Armenian Gospels of the Infancy* in Abraham Terian, *The Armenian Gospel of the Infancy: With Three Early Versions of the Protevangelium of James* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). An overview and English translation of Maximus the Confessor's *Life of the Virgin*, extant in Old Georgian though originally penned in Greek, in idem, *The Life of the Virgin* (trans. Stephen J. Shoemaker; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012). Many of the episodes in PJ, including the nativity of Mary and her presentation in the temple, also find their way (through the Latin sources mentioned) into the *Legenda aurea* of Jacobus de Voragine, a widely popular thirteenth-century collection of hagiographies.

⁸ So Stephen J. Shoemaker, "Between Scripture and Tradition: The Marian Apocrypha of Early Christianity," in *The Reception and Interpretation of the Bible in Late Antiquity: Proceedings of the Montréal Colloquium in Honour of Charles Kannengiesser, 11-13 October 2006* (BAC 6; eds. Lorenzo DiTommaso and Lucian Turescu; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 499. For PJ in Coptic, see Forbes Robinson, "Sahidic Fragments of the Life of the Virgin" in *Coptic Apocryphal Gospels* (TS 4.2; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896), 2-41; J. Leipoldt, "Ein säidisches Bruchstück des Jakobus-Protevangelium," *ZNW* 6 (1905): 106-7; in Syriac, A. Smith Lewis, *Apocrypha Syriaca: The Protevangelium Jacobi and Transitus Mariae* (SS 11; London: C. J. Clay and Sons, 1902); Eberhard Nestle, "Ein syrisches Bruchstück aus dem Protevangelium Iacobi," *ZNW* 3 (1902): 86-87; in Armenian, Frederick C. Conybeare, "Protevangelium Iacobi," *AJT* 1 (1897): 424-42; Esayi Tayets'i, *Ankanon girkh' Nor Ktakaranats'* (T'angaran haykakan hin ew nor dprut'eants'; Venice: S. Ghazar, 1898); in Georgian, G. Garitte, "Le 'Protévangile de Jacques' en géorgien," *Mus* 70 (1957): 233-65; J. N. Birdsall, "A Second Georgian Rescension of the Protevangelium Jacobi," *Mus* 83 (1970): 49-72; in Ethiopic, I. I. Porfirjev, "'Liber natiuitatis Mariae,'" in *Apocrypha de Beata Maria Virgine* (SA 1, 7; Rome: Excudebat Karolus de Luigi, 1909; repr. Louvain, 1955), 3-19; in Slavonic, Alexander Nikolaevich Pypin, *[False and Dismissed Books of Ancient Russia]* (St. Petersburg: 1862), 78-80; S. Novakovic, "[The Apocryphal Proto-Gospel of James]," *Starine* 10 (1878): 61-71; I. I. Porfirjev,

accurate to speak of its having been “lost,” at least not entirely.⁹ But Postel’s translation and subsequent publication of PJ are not without value; he is rightly credited with reintroducing to the West a text that had long influenced the theological imaginations of many generations, largely without their knowing.

2.2. An Overview of the Contents of PJ

Paul Foster divides the narrative into four parts: three main sections followed by a brief epilogue. I reproduce these divisions here with details of the events that occur in each.¹⁰

“[Apocryphal Sayings about New Testament People and Events in Manuscripts of the Solovetski Library],” *Nauk* 52 (1890): 10-13, 136-148; P. A. Lavrov, “[Apocryphal Texts],” *Nauk* 67 (1899): 52-69; Natalino Radovich, *Un frammento slavo del Protevangelio di Giacomo* (BED; Naples: Cymba 1969); in Arabic, G. Garitte, “‘Protevangelii Jacobi’ versio arabica antiquior,” *Mus* 86 (1973): 377-96; in Latin, Jose Antonio de Aldama, “Fragmentos de una versión latina del Protoevangelio de Santiago y una nueva adaptación de sus primeros capítulos,” *Bib* 43 (1962): 57-74; Émile de Strycker, “Une ancienne version latine de Protévangile de Jacques avec des extraits de la Vulgate de Matthieu 1-2 et Luc 1-2,” *AnBoll* (1965): 365-402; F. Vattioni, “Frammento latino del Vangelo di Giacomo,” *Aug* 17 (1977): 505-9; Rita Beyers, “Latin Translation of the Protevangelium of James in MS. Paris, Sainte-Geneviève, 2787,” in *Apocrypha Hibernia I: Evangelia Infantiae* (ed. Martin McNamara; Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), 171-88; Jean-Daniel Kaestli, “Le Protévangile de Jacques dans l’homélie *Inquirendum est* pour la fête de la nativité de Marie,” *Apocrypha* 12 (2001): 99-153. Mary B. Cunningham, on the feasts of the Commemoration of Joachim and Anna, Mary’s Presentation, and Anna’s conception: “By the early eighth century at the latest, the *Protevangelion* had achieved full acceptance in the Byzantine liturgical and theological traditions” (“The Use of the *Protevangelion of James* in Eighth-Century Homilies on the Mother of God,” in *The Cult of the Mother of God in Byzantium: Texts and Images* [BBOS; eds. Leslie Brubaker and Mary B. Cunningham; Farnham: Ashgate, 2011], 167).

⁹ So Zervos: “Any suggestion that [PJ] had to be ‘rediscovered’ by an eccentric adventurer from western Europe in the middle of the sixteenth century is refuted immediately by the list ... below of 167 known Greek manuscript witnesses containing this apocryphon which date from the fourth through the nineteenth centuries” (“Prolegomena,” iv). Similarly Charles Bertram Lewis: “Although [PJ] was banned as heretical and spurious ... its popularity was no whit diminished” (“The Origin of the Weaving Songs and the Theme of the Girl at the Fountain,” *PMLA* 37 [1922]: 154).

¹⁰ Foster, “Protevangelium,” 575. These chapter and verse numbers are keyed to Hock’s edition and are discussed below.

A) PJ 1:1-8:2 - *Mary's conception, her birth, and events until her adolescence.* Anna and Joachim are a pious and childless Israelite couple. When a temple official tells him that he cannot offer gifts in the temple without having produced offspring, Joachim goes to the wilderness to mourn (PJ 1:4-11). Anna likewise mourns her childlessness, and because her husband is now absent she also mourns her widowhood (PJ 2:1). An angel appears and informs her that she will become pregnant and that her child will be famous (PJ 3:1-4:1). She vows her child to the service of the Lord (PJ 4:2). Joachim receives a similar message, and when he arrives home, he and Anna embrace (PJ 4:9). When Anna gives birth to a girl, she names her Mary (PJ 5:10), and in fulfillment of their promise Joachim and Anna bring her to the temple when she turns three (PJ 7:4-6). Mary lives in the temple for approximately nine years, "fed like a dove, receiving food from the hand of an angel" (PJ 8:2).

B) PJ 8:3-16:8 - *Mary's "marriage" to Joseph, her pregnancy, and preservation of her virginity.* When Mary turns twelve, the priests assemble to determine what is to be done with this girl who is on the verge of becoming a woman and whose imminent bodily processes will soon contaminate the sanctuary (PJ 8:3-4). They decide that she will be given as a wife to one of the widowers of Israel. The priests gather the widowers to the temple and Joseph is chosen by divination to be Mary's caretaker (PJ 9:1-7). After some initial resistance, Joseph brings Mary home with him. Shortly thereafter, the priests commission Mary, along with several other virgins, to spin thread to be used in a new temple veil (10:1-5). While she is working, an angel announces to her that she will conceive and bear a son (PJ 11:5). Joseph returns home one day to find her pregnant, and when the temple officials learn of the pregnancy, both are called to give an account (PJ 15). They pass an enigmatic drink test, "the water of the Lord's conviction" (PJ 16:3), and return home praising God (PJ 16:8).

C) PJ 17:1-24:14 - *Journey for the census, the birth of Jesus, and violent events.* Mary begins to labor while she and Joseph (and his children) are *en route* for the census of Caesar Augustus (PJ 17:1-10). Joseph leaves her inside a cave near Bethlehem so that he may search for a midwife (PJ 18:1-2). The narration shifts to the first person and he witnesses the stilling of creation. When everything resumes its course, he finds a midwife and they return to the cave and witness a series of miraculous events (19:12-16). The midwife announces to a woman named Salome that a virgin has just borne a child. Salome enters the cave to see for herself, and when she begins to examine Mary, her hand begins to burn as if it is on fire (PJ 19:18-20:4). An angel tells her to pick up Jesus, at which point she complies and is healed (PJ 20:8-12). Magi appear to Herod, ask him the whereabouts of the newborn king of Judea, are led by a star to the cave, and return home by a different route (PJ 21:1-12). When Herod realizes that he has been tricked, he begins to kill all infants less than two years old (PJ 22:1). His agents question Zechariah about the location of his son, John the Baptist, and when he resists, he is murdered (PJ 23:1-9). The narrative ends with Simeon being chosen to replace him (PJ 24:12-13).

D) PJ 25:1-4 - *Epilogue: putative author and circumstances of composition.* The text purports to have been written by a man named James, after the death of Herod (ca. 4 C.E.), when Jerusalem was in tumult (PJ 25:1). The author says that he went to the desert to avoid the chaos, and that while he was there God gave him the wisdom to pen the account (PJ 25:2-3). The final lines offer a blessing: “May grace be with all who fear the Lord. Amen” (PJ 25:4).¹¹

¹¹ Following Papyrus Bodmer V (via de Strycker), Hock’s text concludes: “Birth of Mary, Revelation of James. Peace to the writer and the reader (Γένεσις Μαρίας Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰακώβ. Εἰρήνη τῷ γράψαντι καὶ τῷ ἀναγινώσκοντι)” (PJ 25:4).

2.3. *Status quaestionis*

In contrast to other ancient Christian texts, canonical and apocryphal alike, PJ has been the subject of relatively few *sustained* treatments. It often receives mention in a brief paragraph or footnote supplementing a larger argument, and rather than attempt to chart a path through these often terse references, I here address the history of research via five headings: critical edition, provenance, date and sources, literary unity, and structure. Under the first, I note the various attempts over the past several hundred years to establish a reliable text, noting that a comprehensive critical edition has yet to be published. The literary unity of this text is a complicated question, as scholars in the past (and many in the present) have considered it to be a compilation. But in more recent years the argument has been made that to read PJ as a literary unit is a valid exercise, and that the text exhibits characteristics of a unified narrative.

2.3.1. Critical Edition

There is currently no critical edition of PJ that takes into account the full breadth of the MS evidence.¹² Since the publication of Postel's Latin translation in 1552, steps have been taken in the right direction. Michael Neander published the first Greek edition of the text in 1564 as an appendix to a Greek and Latin Catechism of Martin Luther, and in 1703, Johann Albert Fabricius divided it into twenty-five chapters, presenting it alongside Postel's Latin.¹³

¹² Bart Ehrman and Zlatko Plêse refer to the production of such an edition as a "desideratum of early Christian studies" (*The Apocryphal Gospels: Texts and Translations* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011], 33).

¹³ Neander, ed., *Catechesis Martini Lutheri parva graeco-latina* (Basel: Ioannis Oporinum,

In 1804, Andreas Birch integrated two Vatican MSS (Vat. gr. 455, 654) into Neander's text, resulting in the first attempt at a critical edition. J. C. Thilo departed from previous editions almost thirty years later and produced a new text from nine different MSS, a tenth-century MS (Par. gr. 1454) serving as the base text.¹⁴

Constantin von Tischendorf furthered the work of Thilo and Birch in 1853 by publishing an edition that incorporated data from seven additional MSS (Ven. MSS II. 42, 363; Mil. MSS A63, C92; Ven. MS VII. 40; Par. Coislin 152; and Dres. MS A187 [now lost]), bringing the total number of MSS to eighteen.¹⁵ He retained Fabricius' chapter numbers but divided them into verses. The 1853 edition was revised in 1876, shortly after his death, and

1564), 356-92; Fabricius, *Codex Apocryphus Novi Testamenti* (2 vols.; Hamburg: Schiller, 1703-1719), 1:66-125. The single MS used in Neander's edition was lost for many years, until de Strycker claimed to have located it in the course of his research ("Le Protévangile de Jacques: Problèmes critiques et exégétiques," in *Studia Evangelica* 3 [TU 88; ed. F. L. Cross; Berlin: Akademie, 1964], 340). A second edition of Neander's Greek text was published in 1567 and was reproduced shortly thereafter in J. J. Grynæus, *Monumenta S. Patrum Orthodoxographa, hoc est Theologiae sacrosanctae ac syncerioris fidei Doctores, numero circiter LXXXV* (Basel: Henric Petrina 1569). The same text appears with an accompanying English translation in Jeremiah Jones, *A New and Full Method of Settling the Canonical Authority of the New Testament* (2 vols.; London: J. Clark and R. Hett, 1726).

¹⁴ Birch, ed., *Auctarium codicis Apocryphi Novi Testamenti Fabriciani* (Copenhagen: Arntzen & Hartier, 1804); Thilo, ed., *Codex apocryphus Novi Testamenti, e libris editis et manuscriptis, maxime Gallicanis, Germanicis et Italicis, Collectus, recensitus notisque et prolegomenis illustratus* (Leipzig: Vogel, 1832). Thilo employs in this edition the text of Neander (via Fabricius), Birch's two Vatican MSS, Parisian gr. MSS 1174, 1176, 1190, 1215, 1468, and Vienna MS Theol. gr. 123. Shortly after Thilo's publication, C. A. Suckow (*Protevangeliū Jacobi ex cod. ms. Venetiano descripsit prolegomenis, varietate lectionum, notis criticis instructum* [Breslau: Grassium, Barthium et socium, 1840]) produced what Zervos calls "a less significant advance in the critical study" of PJ ("Prolegomena," xxvi). Richard Adelbert Lipsius (*Die apokryphen Apostelgeschichten und Apostellegenden: Ein Beitrag zur altschristlichen Literaturgeschichte* [3 vols.; Braunschweig: C. A. Schwetschke, 1883], 701) likewise remarks that Suckow's edition is "critically of small value." Suckow used as his base text a MS different from Thilo's, and while he cites some variants, none are from MSS not already known.

¹⁵ Tischendorf, ed., "ΓΕΝΝΗΣΙΣ ΜΑΡΙΑΣ ΤΗΣ ΑΓΙΑΣ ΘΕΟΤΟΚΟΥ ΚΑΙ ΥΠΕΡΕΝΔΟΞΟΥ ΜΗΤΡΟΣ ΙΗΣΟΥ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ [Birth of Mary the Holy *Theotokos* and Exceedingly Glorious Mother of Jesus Christ]," *Evangelia Apocrypha* (Leipzig: Mendelssohn, 1853), 1-49.

features a slightly altered text and critical apparatus.¹⁶ As the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw few advances in the massive text-critical work that had occupied PJ scholarship for the previous century, Tischendorf's 1876 text was considered for some time *the* standard edition of PJ.¹⁷ It remains influential today, forming the basis of Elliott's translation in his oft-cited collection of Christian apocryphal literature.¹⁸

The discovery of the Bodmer Papyri in 1952 rekindled interest in PJ's MS tradition. Dating from the third century, Papyrus Bodmer V contains the oldest extant copy of PJ.¹⁹ The text occupies the first forty-nine pages of a fifty-six page codex, the final pages containing apocryphal correspondences between Paul and the Corinthians. Michel Testuz's investigations into other codices in the Bodmer library led him to conclude that the

¹⁶ Idem, "ΓΕΝΝΗΣΙΣ ΜΑΡΙΑΣ ΤΗΣ ΑΓΙΑΣ ΘΕΟΤΟΚΟΥ ΚΑΙ ΥΠΕΡΕΝΔΟΞΟΥ ΜΗΤΡΟΣ ΙΗΣΟΥ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ [Birth of Mary the Holy *Theotokos* and Exceedingly Glorious Mother of Jesus Christ]," *Evangelia Apocrypha* (2d ed.; Leipzig: Mendelssohn, 1876), 1-50.

¹⁷ In 1896, B. P. Grenfell (*An Alexandrian Erotic Fragment and other Greek Papyri Chiefly Ptolemaic* [Oxford: Clarendon]) published a few papyrus fragments that contained portions of PJ, and in 1912, E. Pistelli (in *Papiri greci e latini* [PSIPE; Florence: Ariani], 1:9-15) published five additional papyri from the fourth century that also contained portions of PJ. Additionally, in 1914 Gerhard Rauschen published a new version of Tischendorf's 1876 text that took into account Grenfell's papyri (*Monumenta minora saeculi secundi* (FP 3; Bonn: Sumptibus Petri Hanstein, 1914)). Tischendorf's 1876 edition provides the basis for numerous influential studies in the early twentieth century, including Émile Amann, *Le Protévangile de Jacques et ses remaniements latins: Introduction, textes, traduction et commentaire* (LANT; Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1910); M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1924; reprinted often), 38-49.

¹⁸ Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 57-67.

¹⁹ Testuz, *Papyrus Bodmer V: Nativité de Marie* (Cologne-Geneva: Bibliotheca Bodmeriana, 1958), 22. Arguments for a third-century date are not convincing to all. Exceptions (all of which date it to the fourth) include Hans-Josef Klauck, *Apokryphe Evangelien: Eine Einführung* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Biblewerk, 2002), 89; Oscar Cullmann, "Infancy Gospels," in *New Testament Apocrypha: Gospels and Related Writings* (ed. W. Schneemelcher; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 421; Vuong, *Accessing*, 7. Jutta C. Raithel dates it (in passing) to the end of the second, but this claim is never substantiated in the course of his otherwise meticulous study ("Beginning at the End: Literary Unity and the Relationship Between Anthropology and Liturgy in the *Proteuangelium Jacobi* [P. Bodm. 5]" [PhD diss., The Catholic University of America, 2011], 1).

“original” Bodmer V MS contained additional texts, including the eleventh *Ode of Solomon*, Jude, Melito of Sardis’s *Peri Pascha*, *The Apology of Phileas*, Psalms 33, 34, and a small fragment of an early Christian hymn.²⁰

Employing Papyrus Bodmer V as a base text, in 1961 the Bollandist Émile de Strycker produced what is currently the most recent critical edition of PJ, the first of its kind since Tischendorf’s 1876 publication.²¹ In it, he incorporates various Armenian, Coptic, Ethiopic, Georgian, and Latin translations of PJ, as well as the MS evidence presented by Tischendorf. While this edition is a step forward in text-critical study of PJ, de Strycker himself acknowledges that the work is provisional.²²

Shortly before Testuz’ publication of Bodmer V, the American scholar Boyd Lee Daniels completed a massive dissertation at Duke University cataloging much of the Greek MSS tradition of PJ.²³ When he began his study, it was unclear how many MSS containing PJ were extant. Estimates ranged from thirty-five to forty. In the course of his research, Daniels

²⁰ Testuz, *Papyrus Bodmer VII-IX: L’Épître de Jude, les deux Épîtres de Pierre, les Psaumes 33 et 34* (Cologne-Geneva: Bibliotheca Bodmeriana, 1959), 8-9. The text of PJ in Bodmer V has been dated on paleographic grounds to the third century (so Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians*, 97). But the presence of the *Apology of Phileas*, which could not have been written before Phileas’s martyrdom (in ca. 306-307 C.E.), suggests that the codex may have undergone several stages of assembly. For a more full discussion of the codex, see Thomas A. Wayment, *The Text of the New Testament Apocrypha (100-400 CE)* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 51-52.

²¹ De Strycker, *La Forme la plus ancienne du Protévangile de Jacques* (SH 33; Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1961).

²² Idem, “Die griechischen Handschriften des Protevangeliums Iacobi,” in *Griechische Kodikologie und Textüberlieferung* (ed. D. Harlfinger; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980), 580. Zervos critiques de Strycker for allying himself too closely with Tischendorf’s work: “The only negative statement that [he] could bring himself to make about Tischendorf’s critical apparatus is that the German scholar accorded to his MS A (Ven. Marc. II. 82, BD 304) more weight than was justified” (“Prolegomena,” XXXVI).

²³ Daniels, “The Greek Manuscript Tradition of the Protevangelium Jacobi” (PhD diss., Duke University, 1956).

discovered no less than *one hundred and thirty-eight* MSS containing at least portions of the text, and of these he was able to provide detailed accounts of eighty-one. His work received scant attention, eclipsed as it was by the fanfare of the new Bodmer Papyri (which he did not have access to), and is nowhere mentioned by de Strycker.

Thirty years after Daniels completed his study, Zervos lamented the paucity of attention that scholars had given to it: “This immense depository of primary material ... was allowed to gather dust on a shelf in the Duke University library and was deemed worth of only a single obscure footnote in reference to its inaccessibility.”²⁴ As a remedy, Zervos undertook the task of cataloging the remaining MSS containing PJ, seeing his own research as furthering that of his predecessor: “My work would constitute a second major step—after that of Daniels—toward the ultimate goal of a definitive critical edition of the original text of this apocryphon based upon all extant manuscript witnesses.”²⁵ He succeeded in collating forty-five MSS, bringing the total number accessible to scholars to one hundred and twenty-five. Taken together, the work of Daniels and Zervos is impressive, if unfinished. A partial framework has been set for a definitive critical edition of PJ, but there remains much work to be done.

The most current edition of PJ, and the standard for the majority of recent studies, is Ronald Hock’s.²⁶ It is not a true critical edition, but a hybrid of Tischendorf and de Strycker. While Hock depends heavily on de Strycker, his text departs from it in three ways. First, in

²⁴ Zervos, “Prolegomena,” xxxiii. Referenced footnote in H. R. Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi: A Commentary* (ANT 1; trans. G. E. van Baaren-Pape; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1965), 5.

²⁵ Zervos, “Prolegomena,” ix-ix.

²⁶ Hock, *The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas* (SB 2; Santa Rosa: Polebridge, 1995). The more recently published Greek text of Ehrman and Plêse (*Apocryphal Gospels*, 40-71) draws heavily from de Strycker, as the authors acknowledge (*ibid.*, 35).

contrast to de Strycker's organization of the text by the line numbers of Bodmer V, Hock retains Fabricius's chapter numbering while adding more frequent verse numbers than Tischendorf. Second, he often deviates from de Strycker in favor of Tischendorf or other MSS, indicating when he has done so. Third, he incorporates a sixth-century papyrus (*P.Oxy.* 3524) that was discovered after the publication of de Strycker's text and not included in Zervos's catalogue of extant MSS.²⁷

Hock's publication stands in a long line of tentative editions. Calling attention to the pioneering work of de Strycker, Daniels, and Zervos, he wonders if "perhaps a definitive edition is not too far off."²⁸ While rumors circulate from time to time that one is "in the works," nearly twenty years have passed and still no critical text exists. Time will tell. In the meantime, I employ Hock's text in this project, noting instances in it deviates significantly from Tischendorf, de Strycker, or other MSS.

2.3.2. Provenance

The broad geographical dispersion of MSS containing PJ, along with the range of languages into which the text was translated, makes determining its provenance difficult. Four options arise from a survey of the relevant material: "not Palestine," Palestine, Egypt, and Syria. While certain of these are more tenable than others, all are provisional.

²⁷ As it contains only the penultimate verse of PJ and the epilogue, this papyrus has no substantial impact on Hock's version.

²⁸ Hock, *Infancy Gospels*, 30.

A) *Not Palestine* - The judgment that PJ was *not* written in Palestine is based on observations of the author's lack of knowledge of the geography and culture of the region.²⁹ De Strycker names four points at which this ignorance is perhaps most glaring. First, Joachim's rapid transition from Jerusalem to the desert (PJ 1:4) and then back (PJ 2:3) indicates that for the author of PJ the desert is near the gates of Jerusalem. Second, because the verb *καταβαίνειν* (typically referring to descent) is used to narrate Joachim's return from the desert, de Strycker concludes that for the author the mountains and the desert are more or less equivalent (PJ 1:11; 4:4-5), and that this way of speaking was common in Egypt but not Palestine.³⁰ Third, Joseph and Mary presumably live in Jerusalem when Augustus calls for a census of Bethlehem, but they participate (PJ 17:1-2): it would seem that in his or her adaptation of Luke 2:1, the author has turned Bethlehem into a region rather than a city.³¹ Fourth, Judea, Jerusalem, and Bethlehem are confused, especially toward the end of the text. So, for example, because Joseph prepares to depart Bethlehem *for* Judea, the author is apparently unaware that Bethlehem is *in* Judea (PJ 21:1). These geographical blunders prove, at least for the majority of scholars, that the author of PJ has little to no firsthand knowledge of Palestine.

²⁹ So Johannes Quasten: the author of PJ "shows an astonishing ignorance of the geography of Palestine" (*Patrology: The Beginnings of Patristic Literature* [Utrecht: Spectrum, 1950], 121). Quasten's argument is anticipated by Rauschen (*Monumenta*, 14) and repeated by Wilhelm Michaelis (*Die Apokryphen Schriften zum Neuen Testament* [2d ed.; Bremen: Carl Schunemann, 1958], 71).

³⁰ *Καταβαίνειν* describes the downward movement of other characters: the angel who visits Joachim "goes down" to do so (from heaven, presumably) (*ἄγγελος γὰρ κυρίου κατέβη πρὸς Ἰωακείμ*) (PJ 4:4); Joachim "goes down" from the temple (*καὶ κατέβη ἐκ τοῦ ναοῦ κυρίου*) (5:4); Joachim and Anna "go down" from the temple after leaving Mary there (*καὶ κατέβησαν οἱ γονεῖς αὐτῆς*) (8:1); Joseph finds the midwife as she is "going down" from the hill country (*καὶ εἶδον γυναῖκα καταβαίνουσαν ἀπὸ τῆς ὄρεινῆς*) (19:1).

³¹ I argue in Chapter Five that Joseph and Mary are living in *Bethlehem* rather than Jerusalem when the census is called.

B) Palestine - There are some who would allow for the *possibility* of a Palestinian provenance, but they are in the minority. Malcolm Lowe, for example, claims that many who have accused the author as being ignorant of Palestinian geography are *themselves* ignorant of Palestinian geography: “Any Jerusalem resident (like myself) knows that the Judean desert *does* begin on the eastern slopes of the mountains adjoining Jerusalem.”³² Moreover, he notes that the author employs terminology characteristic of a Palestinian writer; specifically, that he or she consistently refers to the people of Palestine as Ἰσραήλ rather than Ἰουδαῖοι.³³ The sole exception is found on the lips of the magi (the only non-Israelites in PJ), who question Herod on the whereabouts of the newborn King of the Jews (Ἰουδαῖοι) (PJ 21:2). While these observations are intriguing, Hock points out that “even Lowe must resort to excision at 21:1 in order to save the author from the confusion of going from Bethlehem into Judea.”³⁴ That the author uses titles characteristic of writers living in Palestine does not necessarily mean that he or she was a resident of Palestine. It seems more likely that the author was familiar with literature *about* Palestine (e.g., the HB/LXX) and that he or she exercises some skill in imitating this literature.

C) Egypt - De Strycker prefers an Egyptian to a Palestinian provenance, noting the “modesty” of the author’s Greek and what he terms the incorporation of “Coptic elements.” Moreover, he points to the fact that the earliest references to PJ are from theologians in Egypt (specifically, Alexandria): Clement (ca. 150-215) refers to the tradition of Mary’s having been examined after the birth of Jesus and found to be a virgin (*Strom.* 7.16.93); and

³² Lowe, “Ἰουδαῖοι of the Apocrypha: A Fresh Approach to the Gospels of James, Pseudo-Thomas, Peter and Nicodemus,” *NovT* 23 (1981): 62 (emphasis added).

³³ *Ibid.*, 60.

³⁴ Hock, *Infancy Gospels*, 13.

Origen (ca. 184-253) cites it in a discussion of Jesus' siblings in the Gospel of Matthew (*Comm. in Matt.* 10.17).³⁵ De Strycker's arguments have gained a level of acceptance, albeit qualified.³⁶

D) *Syria* - Taking up an earlier argument of Ludwig Conrady, H. R. Smid suggests that the author's use of a "laurel tree (δαφνιδέα)" in the scene of Anna's lament (PJ 2:8; 3:1) may evidence a Syrian provenance, more specifically the Syrian city of Antioch, renowned for its gardens and commonly called Ἀντιόχεια ἡ ἐπὶ Δάφνῃ.³⁷ But Smid considers this judgment to be inconclusive for at least two reasons: first, that the earliest forms of Christianity in both Syria and Egypt were characterized by what he calls an "unorthodox tint," and that PJ does not have "any unorthodox traits"; and second, that an understanding of the differences between Egyptian and Syrian Christianities is not sufficient to allow for a firm choice between them.³⁸

³⁵ De Strycker, *Forme*, 419-21. Ehrman and Plêse note that the reference to PJ in Clement is less certain than that in Origen (*Apocryphal Gospels*, 32).

³⁶ So Edouard Cothenet, "Le Protévangile de Jacques: origine, genre et signification d'un premier midrash chrétien sur la Nativité de Marie," *ANRW* 25.6: 4267; Morton Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 189-91; Philipp Vielhauer, *Geschichte der urchristlichen Literatur* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1975), 668.

³⁷ So Conrady, "Das Protevangelium Jacobi in neuer Beleuchtung," *TSK* 62 (1889): 770-72.

³⁸ Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi*, 22. The argument for a Syrian provenance, according to Vorster (James, *Protevangelium of*, *ABD* 3:680), is strengthened by Hans von Campenhausen's observation that much of the material related to the virgin birth originated in Syria (*Die Jungfrauengeburt in der Theologie der alten Kirche* [SHAW; Heidelberg: Winter, 1962], 14-15). Richard Bauckham (*Jude and the Relatives of Jesus in the Early Church* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990], 27-28) sides in favor of a Syrian provenance, claiming that the text shares certain characteristics with other Syrian texts (*Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah*, *Odes of Solomon*, *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*). This reasoning is somewhat circular, as it presupposes a provenance for those works with which PJ shares affinities.

Addressing the question of provenance, Hock suggests that “perhaps only negative answers are possible.”³⁹ A brief survey of material related to the topic certainly supports this notion, however pessimistic. Arguments for locales more specific than “not Palestine” are attractive but ultimately inconclusive. But as Adam Fyfe Findlay observed nearly a century ago, “authorship and *provenance* in the case of a book like the *Protevangelium* are comparatively small matters; what is more to the point is to recognize its value as a piece of early Christian literature and to understand the religious conditions amid which it was produced and the end which it was designed to serve.”⁴⁰

2.3.3. Date and Sources

The question of PJ’s date and the sources that constitute it has also proven difficult to answer. Postel and Bibliander believed the text to be the product of a single hand, that of James the brother of Jesus (mentioned in Matt 13:55; Mark 6:3; Gal 1:19), which would give it a first-century *terminus ante quem*.⁴¹ This view was standard currency for many years, but scholars today are rightly skeptical of the notion that this text was written by a single person in the first century, much less by James himself.⁴² The current consensus is that while

³⁹ Hock, *Infancy Gospels*, 12.

⁴⁰ Findlay, *Byways in Early Christian Literature: Studies in the Uncanonical Gospels and Acts* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1923), 158 (emphasis original).

⁴¹ De Strycker, *Forme*, 6.

⁴² Cf. Zervos, who allows for the possibility of a first-century date. While he does not entertain the notion that any part of it was written by James, he does hold that the text was available to Justin Martyr and that portions of it may predate the canonical gospels. (“Dating the *Protevangelium of James*: The Justin Martyr Connection,” in *Society of Biblical Literature 1994 Seminar Papers* [SBLSP 33; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994], 415-34; idem, “An Early Non-Canonical Annunciation Story,” in *Society of Biblical Literature 1997 Seminar Papers* [SBLSP 36; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997], 664-91).

portions of it almost certainly reflect traditions that predate its composition, its present form dates from the mid- to late-second century.

Adolf Hilgenfeld was the first to pose the question of sources in PJ.⁴³ He observed that certain traditions present in it (e.g., Jesus' birth in a cave) were familiar to Justin Martyr, which would theoretically lend a composition date in the early second century. Lipsius dates the text's final form, which he takes to be a medley of three distinct sources (a Jewish-Christian source attributed to James; a Gnostic work that bears the name of Joseph; and "various Catholic recensions" resulting from the editing of the previous two), to the late third century.⁴⁴ Alexander Berendts argues that it dates from as late as the fourth century, but that much it may have belonged to earlier traditions in which John the Baptist and his family were more prominent.⁴⁵

In 1897, Adolf von Harnack formulated what continues to be an influential source theory, namely, that PJ is a composite of three independent sources: a "Nativity of Mary," dating from the beginning of the third century (PJ 1-17); a "Joseph Apocryphon," dating from the latter half of the second century (PJ 18-20); and a "Zechariah Apocryphon," dating from some time in the second century (PJ 22-24). The *combination* of these sources, in his

⁴³ Hilgenfeld, *Kritische Untersuchungen über die Evangelien Justin's, der clementischen Homilien und Marcion's: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der ältesten Evangelien-Literatur* (Halle: Schwetschke, 1850), 153-61. So also Tischendorf, *Wann wurden unsere Evangelien verfasst* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1866), 35. N.b., Hilgenfeld's primary interest was the text's relationship with the works of Justin Martyr, not PJ itself.

⁴⁴ Lipsius, *Die apokryphen Apostelgeschichten*, 702-3.

⁴⁵ Berendts, *Studien über Zacharias-Apokryphen und Zacharias-Legenden* (Leipzig: Georg Böhme, 1895). Amann agrees that this material was likely added later, perhaps as late as the fifth century (*Protévangile*, 99-100). So also Findlay, *Byways*, 149.

view, took place no earlier than the middle of the fourth century.⁴⁶ This source theory, in the words of de Strycker, had an “influence décisive” on PJ scholarship and few rose to challenge it for some time.⁴⁷

The discovery of the third-century Papyrus Bodmer V, of course, eliminated many of the later dates proposed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including that of Harnack. And while the text of PJ in Bodmer V exhibits characteristics indicative of editorial activity (corrections, omissions, etc.), it provides evidence of a pre-third-century version that is at least *similar* to what we possess today.

P. A. van Stempvoort has proposed what is currently the most *precise* attempt at dating PJ, arguing that its author was a contemporary of Origen, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian, and that it was written in direct response to Celsus’s *The True Word* (Ἀληθῆς λόγος).⁴⁸ In this work, Celsus asserts polemically that Mary was from an impoverished family, that she worked as a spinner to make ends meet, and that her conception of Jesus was the product of an adulterous relationship with a Roman soldier named Panthera (a charge often repeated later). The author of PJ, by contrast, asserts that Mary’s father was “exceedingly wealthy” (1:1), that she spun not for money but to provide thread for the temple veil in Jerusalem (10:8), and that her virginity and purity need not be questioned,

⁴⁶ Von Harnack, *Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur bis Eusebius* (2 vols.; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1897), 1:600-3.

⁴⁷ De Strycker, *Forme*, 99-100.

⁴⁸ Van Stempvoort, “The Protevangelium Jacobi, the Sources of its Theme and Style and their Bearing on its Date,” in *Studia Evangelica* 3 (TU 88; ed. F. L. Cross; Berlin: Akademie, 1964), 410-26. Original publication in idem, “De bronnen van het thema en de stijl van het Protevangelium Jacobi en de datering daarvan,” *NedTTs* 16 (1961): 18-34.

even after the birth of Jesus.⁴⁹ Van Stempvoort concludes that “this well-fitting whole of polemic and apologetic, added to the fact that Origen knew a *Biblos Jakobou* and that many indirect testimonials of his contemporaries referred to the subject matter of the P.J., gives us a right to date this apocryphon between \pm 178 (Celsus) and 248 (*Contra Cels.*).”⁵⁰ He refines the *terminus ante quem* in light of several proposed correspondences between PJ and Hippolytus’s homily on Susanna (in *Comm. Dan.*), written between 202 and 204 C.E. He does not argue for a *literary* relationship between them, but he interprets the commonalities as indicating a similar time of composition (ca. 180-204 C.E.).⁵¹

2.3.4. A Literary Unity?

The source-critical work of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (especially that of Harnack) demonstrates that the current form of the narrative is almost certainly the product of an editorial hand (or hands), but as Hock observes, “Harnack’s influence is waning today, in part because the penchant for source theories has declined but also because the case for literary unity is argued more effectively.”⁵² And works that approach PJ as a literary unity, while they do not *necessarily* overturn the earlier work on its sources, have become increasingly more common.⁵³

⁴⁹ Also Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi*, 15-17.

⁵⁰ Van Stempvoort, “Protevangelium Jacobi,” 415 (emphasis original).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 419-25.

⁵² Hock, *Infancy Gospels*, 14.

⁵³ So Mary F. Foskett: “It is fair to say that while some interpreters continue to read the text as a composite work, their view no longer dominates interpretation of PJ” (“A Virgin Conceived: Virginitas as Character Indicator in Luke-Acts and the Protevangelium of James” [PhD diss., Emory University, 1999], 13).

The grounds on which scholars uphold the text's literary unity are diverse. De Strycker concludes on the basis of both style and vocabulary that its *original* unity is "certain." He does not deny that editors were at certain points responsible for minor revisions and omissions, but he is convinced that a single individual penned the majority of the text.⁵⁴ His theory is perhaps the most brazen critique of the earlier *status quo* and as Raithel points out, what distinguishes it "is not [his] insistence that PJ as a whole was created at the same time, but rather his claim that the entire narrative ... was a newly written and unified work."⁵⁵

Hock considers the verbal and syntactical consistency of PJ to be "noteworthy" and even "in favor of literary unity," but he maintains that this alone cannot provide sufficient rationale for examination of the text as a literary whole.⁵⁶ Instead, he proposes Mary's purity as the theme that binds the narrative together, noting the frequency with which it appears: "This purity is especially evident in the claims that Mary was a virgin before, during, and after the birth of Jesus ..., but the theme is in fact present throughout the gospel."⁵⁷ Independent of Hock's work on the subject, Beverly R. Gaventa prefers to speak of Mary's "sacred purity" as the author's chief interest. "Purity" alone, she argues, implies "general behavior in relation to other human beings and in conformity with the divine will." Employing Peter Brown's characterization of the Virgin as "a human creature totally enclosed in sacred space," Gaventa posits that "the unfolding drama of the Protevangelium

⁵⁴ De Strycker, *Forme*, 397, 399-404. Argument repeated in idem, "Protévangile," 352.

⁵⁵ Raithel, "Beginning at the End," 30.

⁵⁶ Hock, *Infancy Gospels*, 14.

⁵⁷ Specific examples in PJ 4:1, 4; 5:9; 6:3-5; 7:7-8:2; 9:8, 11-12; 10:1-8; 16:7; 17:2-3; 19:9 (in *ibid.*, 15).

is the drama of maintaining and defending Mary's sacred purity."⁵⁸ With the exception of the final chapters (21:1-25:1), which "may not be part of the original Protevangelium," and which notably do not exhibit a concern for Mary's purity, Gaventa addresses the narrative as if it were the product of a single author.

Studies such as these have proven so influential that subsequent scholars need not *argue* for the literary unity of PJ; they may simply *presume* it. In her 1999 dissertation on Mary's *parthenia* as character indicator in PJ and Luke-Acts, for example, Foskett concludes that Mary in PJ is construed as a "single character," and she credits Gaventa and Hock as providing the impetus for her reading.⁵⁹ All of this is not to deny that the author may have used sources, or that a later editor may have added to a preexisting, simpler narrative. Rather, it is to affirm that the narrative as it exists presently is overall a coherent one and that it may be subjected to literary analysis.

2.3.5. Structure

If reading PJ as a single narrative and not merely a disparate collection of narratives is a legitimate enterprise, then it stands to reason that some sort of structure will be discernable. Nicolae Roddy sees PJ as a *chiasm* with Mary's birth and presentation in the temple at the apex.⁶⁰ The thesis is intriguing, if slightly problematic. The equation of

⁵⁸ Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus* (SPNT; Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 110; Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 273.

⁵⁹ Foskett, "A Virgin Conceived," 12-13. So also Vuong, *Accessing*, 3-4.

⁶⁰ Roddy's verse numbers are keyed to Tischendorf. A - Joachim at the temple (1:1-3); B - Joachim in the wilderness (ἐρημος) (1:4); C - Crisis for Joachim and Anna (2:1-3:3); D - Annunciation to Anna (4:1); E - Birth of Mary and Presentation to the Temple (5:2-7:3); D' - Annunciation to Mary

Joachim's fasting in the desert with Joseph's journey to Bethlehem, for example, is tenuous.

In the case of Joachim, the adjective ἔρημος is nominal (and articular), describing a specific place (i.e., *the* desert) to which he has traveled to fast (ἔδωκεν ἑαυτὸν εἰς τὴν ἔρημον καὶ ἔπηξεν τὴν σκηνὴν αὐτοῦ ἐκεῖ) (PJ 1:9). By contrast, ἔρημος in the Joseph material seems to indicate the *type* of place (i.e., a deserted one) that they stop so that Mary can give birth (ὁ τόπος ἔρημός ἐστιν) (PJ 17:11).

Chiastic structure aside, Roddy's observations isolate the Jerusalem temple as an important structuring element that frames the narrative and forms a sort of locational *inclusio*. Moreover, it is the anchor point to and from which the characters travel, most often from their respective houses.⁶¹ The narrative may be divided in terms of the characters that travel to and from the temple together:

1. Joachim travels from the temple (1:4) to the desert (1:9), returns home (4:8), goes back to the temple (5:1), and returns home a final time (5:4).
2. Joachim, Anna, and Mary travel from their home (7:1-5) to the temple (7:6), and then return home, leaving Mary there (8:1).
3. Joseph and Mary travel from the temple (9:11) to Joseph's home (9:12), where he leaves her alone.
4. Mary travels to the temple at the behest of the high priest (10:6) and then returns home to spin (10:8). She returns to present her thread (12:1), visits Elizabeth for a time (12:3), and returns home (12:8).

(11:1-3); C' - Crisis for Joseph and Mary (13:1-16:2); B' - Joseph in the desert (ἔρημος) (17:3-20:3); A' - Symeon in the temple (24:4b) ("The Form and Function of the Protevangelium of James," *CCR* 14 [1993]: 42).

⁶¹ So Vuong, " 'Let Us Bring her Up to the Temple of the Lord': Exploring the Boundaries of Jewish and Christian Relations through the Presentation of Mary in the *Protevangelium of James*," in *Infancy Gospels: Stories and Identities* (WUNT 281; eds. Claire Clivaz et al.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 420.

5. Joseph and Mary travel to the temple to give an account of Mary's pregnancy (15:9), and they return home vindicated (16:8).
6. Joseph, Mary, and Joseph's children travel from their home in Bethlehem (17:5) to an undisclosed location for the census (on this, see Chapter Five, below) (17:11). There is no explicit journey to the temple or Jerusalem in this portion of the narrative, but one is foreshadowed (20:12).
7. The magi travel to Jerusalem to question Herod (21:2), they travel to Bethlehem to visit Mary and Jesus (21:10) and then return to their own country (21:12).
8. Herod's agents travel from Jerusalem to kill the infants in the country (22:2), and then they travel to the temple to question Zechariah (23:2). The events that follow take place in Jerusalem and in the temple. The narrative ends in the temple with Simeon being chosen to replace Zechariah (24:12-14).

Jesus is the only central character who does not travel to the temple (unless one counts his *in utero* visits in 12:1-2 and 15:9-16:8, which the author does not seem to do), but his own journey is foreshadowed at two points.⁶² First, after Salome is healed in the cave, she is told not to tell anyone about what she has seen “until the child comes to Jerusalem (ἕως ἔλθῃ ὁ παῖς εἰς Ἱεροσόλημα)” (PJ 20:12). Second, after Simeon is appointed high priest, the narrator comments that he would not die “until he sees the Christ in the flesh (ἕως ἂν τὸν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἴδῃ)” (PJ 24:14). These observations illustrate at the very least that the text in its present form is the product of a careful and intentional editorial hand.

2.4. Genre and Relationship to the New Testament

Even in light of arguments for its literary unity, the composite nature of PJ complicates the task of assigning it a specific genre. Not surprisingly, scholars are divided

⁶² It is assumed that Elizabeth lives in or near Jerusalem, which in PJ is synonymous with the temple.

among several positions.⁶³ Like the canonical gospels, the text in some ways resembles a Greco-Roman *βίος* (e.g., no significant character development of the protagonist).⁶⁴ As noted above, van Stempvoort considers it an apology, an attempt to protect Mary from defamation.⁶⁵ Hock interprets the text as an *encomium*, written to praise Mary (and encourage readers to do the same) by expounding on her character, upbringing, and achievements.⁶⁶ The apologetic elements in it, he concludes, are secondary to the *encomiastic*. The author calls the work a *historia*, which implies that it has a sort of exegetical or even midrashic function.⁶⁷ And this raises an important point about the question of genre: that the “why” is frequently as significant as the “what.”

PJ is almost certainly intended to be a supplemental rather than an independent narrative; in drawing from and alluding to prominent scenes from the HB/LXX and NT (e.g., Elkanah and Hannah, Mary’s visit to Elizabeth), the author presents Mary’s story in a narrative-historical framework already familiar to the reader. And in doing so, he or she invites the

⁶³ For a fuller account of these positions, see Vuong’s synthesis in *Accessing*, 52-57.

⁶⁴ Friederich Leo’s pioneering work on the topic (*Die griechisch-römische Biographie nach ihrer litterarischen Form* [Leipzig: Teubner, 1901; repr. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1965]) remains influential, although subsequent scholarship has shown that the genre was more flexible and internally diverse than Leo suspected (so Fritz Wehrli, “Gnome, Anekdote und Biographie,” *MH* 30 [1979], 194; Richard A. Burridge, *What are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography* [2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004]).

⁶⁵ Van Stempvoort, “Protevangelium Jacobi,” 410; so also Edouard Cothenet, “Le Protévangile de Jacques,” *ANRW* 25.6, 4256-57.

⁶⁶ Hock, *Infancy Gospels*, 15-20.

⁶⁷ So Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi*, 8; John L. Allen, “The ‘Protevangelium of James’ as an ‘Historia’: The Insufficiency of the ‘Infancy Gospel’ Category,” *SBL Seminar Papers, 1991* (SBLSP 30; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 508; Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1993), 176, 197; Charles Leland Quarles, “An Analysis of Midrash Criticism as Applied to the Synoptic Birth Narratives” (ThD diss., Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 1994), 144-65.

reader to receive this new account in light of the old, but also to reread the old in light of the new. The goal is not to displace the story of Jesus (or Israel) with the story of Mary but to explore the ways that the latter might reshape the former. And the relationship is reciprocal; the stories become intertwined, each giving rise to new readings of the other. This does not make PJ unique among early Christian literature, as similar phenomena have been observed in other apocryphal texts and their canonical counterparts.⁶⁸

From a reader's perspective, then, PJ is a sort of Mariological "reboot" of the Jesus narrative, the relaunching of an already familiar story with a renewed sense of creativity and vitality. The technique has become popular in modern cinema, the past few years bringing reboots of the James Bond series (starting with *Casino Royale* in 2006), Batman (with *Batman Begins* in 2005), Superman (with *Smallville* from 2001 to 2011 and *Man of Steel* in 2012), and Spider-Man (with *The Amazing Spider-Man* in 2012), just to name a few. The label is modern; the concept is not. The Gospel of Luke, for instance, is a conscious attempt at retelling a story that has already been told in similar formats (Luke 1:1-4). Luke "reboots" Mark (one of his chief sources) by beginning *before* Mark's Gospel, with the birth of Jesus, and by developing the story of Jesus within a new narrative framework. The Prologue of John begins even earlier, with the divine λόγος that precedes and animates all created things (John 1:1-18). Or, to cite another example from outside the canon, the *Apocalypse of*

⁶⁸ E.g., Dale C. Allison's study of the Moses narrative in the Gospel of Matthew (*The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993]) and Tony Burke's analysis of the interplay between the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* and the Gospel of Luke ("Completing the Gospel: The Infancy Gospel of Thomas as a Supplement to the Gospel of Luke," in DiTommaso et al., *The Reception and Interpretation of the Bible in Late Antiquity*, 101-19). Inspired by Burke's work on *Inf. Gos. Thom.* and by the many references in PJ to Luke's Gospel (Zechariah and Elizabeth, Simeon, the manger, etc.), my working hypothesis when I began this study was that PJ was written to supplement Luke in particular. I am less convinced of this now, as my exegetical work has revealed a number of points where the author aligns him- or herself with Matthew and, in some cases, John.

Abraham reboots the Abraham narrative in Genesis by beginning while Abraham is working with his father, an idolmaker, before he receives the command to leave his home (Gen 12:1). The authors of these texts presume that their readers are already familiar with at least part of the story that they are going to tell. No ancient reader would have read PJ without at least knowing where the story would end. What the author of PJ does is show readers how the story began.

Reboots are in many ways similar to prequels. Both assume an already established narrative, and both function to supplement that narrative by extending it backward in time. Both commonly draw memorable phrases and tropes from these older narratives, sometimes in ways that may seem banal to devotees of “the original.” They differ insofar as prequels are executed with an eye toward continuity, while reboots frequently betray revisionist impulses; they often *reset* the chronology of the original narrative by beginning before it, and in some cases they generate plot holes to the dismay of their readers. But they share the capacity to affect the way that readers understand the original; elements of the backstory, though created retrospectively, are conflated with the story they are intended to revise or supplement. A new “text” is thus created in the mind of the reader, and the process restarts. The question of PJ’s relationship to the NT is therefore a complicated one.

In recent years scholars have begun to recognize the hermeneutical value of Christian apocryphal literature. By exploring the ways that narrative interprets narrative, for example, François Bovon places apocryphal narrative texts alongside Patristic commentaries as instances of early Christian exegesis.⁶⁹ Brent Landau argues similarly that “while

⁶⁹ Bovon, “Jesus’ Missionary Speech as Interpreted in the Patristic Commentaries and the Apocryphal Narratives,” in *Studies in Early Christianity* (WUNT 161; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 195-208.

apocryphal narratives lack the formality of the commentary genre, they nevertheless perform interpretation of canonical writings by what they emphasize, ignore, or bring together.”⁷⁰

But if later narratives have the capacity to alter their readers’ perception of earlier ones, then the hermeneutical value of Christian apocryphal literature is not limited to determining how authors understand their source material. Rather, the discussion must also include how readers understand the texts that they read, and how these texts and their understanding of them affects the way that they read and understand other texts.

2.5. Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the history of scholarship on PJ, beginning with Postel’s “rediscovery” of the text in 1551. I traced the development of source-critical arguments in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, noted the difficulties in determining its date and provenance, and cited recent studies that advocate for reading it as a literary unit. I concluded by addressing the question of genre and by situating the following chapters in the context of a new approach to Christian apocryphal literature that seeks to understand this and other texts as examples of narrative exegesis. The following chapters are illustrations of this approach, attempts to give compelling readings of an ancient text from the perspective of the reader as well as the author.

⁷⁰ Landau, “The Sages and the Star-Child: Introduction to the *Revelation of the Magi*, an Ancient Christian Apocryphon” (ThD diss., Harvard University, 2008), 221-22.

CHAPTER 3 - THE TEMPLE IN THE TEMPLE (PJ 7-9)

Sovereigns, you have been showed now before
 Of Joachim and Anne, here both in holy meeting,
 How Our Lady was conceived and how she was born,
 We pass over that now, briefness of time considering,
 And how Our Lady, in her tender age and young,
 Into the temple was offered, and so forth, proceed.
 This sentence said, shall be her beginning.
 Now the Mother of Mercy in this be our speed.

N-Town Plays (9.1-8)

Mary spends nine years of her childhood in the temple. She arrives after her third birthday and she stays until she turns twelve, at which point the priests appoint Joseph as her custodian. Her time there marks the beginning of a relationship with the structure that will endure even after she departs from it. The language used to describe her arrival indicates that she is understood as the sacrificial offering of her parents, and the episode as a whole exhibits her exceptional and abiding purity: that she is able to live in the temple suggests that she is already pure, and her remaining there for the duration of her youth implies that nothing will compromise that status.

The reader layers the meaning of this episode through two details: Mary's dancing on the steps of the altar and her receiving food from the hand of an angel. The latter mirrors her spent time at home, where she is fed by Anna in the bedroom-sanctuary, and in this sense the food that the angel brings is an extension of her already restricted diet. But in light of comparable tales of miraculous feedings in Greek and Roman literature and the HB/LXX, it also situates the young Virgin as an integral piece of God's plan for the redemption of Israel. Her dancing likewise seems to connote more than it would claim. On the one hand, it conveys that she is a different sort of sacrifice: she does not die on the altar but dances on its

steps. On the other hand, the image brings to mind certain cultic rituals that are prominent in Ancient Near Eastern and Greek literature, framing her behavior as an act of worship. It also resembles the activities of the Muses and Charites, goddesses responsible for teaching humankind to dance and thereby to commune with God. But because ritual dance in antiquity is typically understood as a collective activity, Mary's dancing alone signifies not only that she is a worshiper of God but that she is the only one present who may be identified as such.

3.1. Introductory Matter

In the mid-sixth century C.E., the Emperor Justinian I constructed an elaborate church next to the old temple mount in Jerusalem. Commonly called the *Nea*, it was completed ca. 543 and stood for many years as a paragon of Byzantine architecture.¹ According to Susan Graham, it communicated, “architecturally, a message regarding Justinian’s imperial policy, imperial presence in Palestine, and a self-conception as a Christian emperor ... [he] could not replace Constantine as the great Christian builder of Jerusalem, but he could attempt at least to establish himself as Constantine’s equal.”² More

¹ The label is from Procopius (ca. 500-565 C.E.), Justinian’s court historian, who writes of “common folk” (ἐπιχώριοι) calling it the “new church (νέαν ἐκκλησίαν)” (*Aedif.* 5.6.2). Cyril of Scythopolis (ca. 525-559 C.E.) attended its dedication (in *Vit. Sabae* 71). The circumstances of its fate are unknown. Margaret Barker claims that it was leveled in the Persian invasion of 614 (“The Life-Bearing Spring,” in *Origins of the Cult of the Virgin Mary* [ed. Chris Maunder; London: Burns & Oates, 2008], 127), but Sophronios of Jerusalem (ca. 560-638 C.E.) reports that it was still standing in 634 (*Hom. in natal. Chr.* 163, 175). Hagith Sivan posits that an earthquake destroyed it in the eighth century (*Palestine in Late Antiquity* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008], 219).

² Graham, “Justinian and the Politics of Space,” in *Constructions of Space II: The Biblical City and Other Imagined Spaces* (eds. Jon L. Berquist and Claudia V. Camp; HBOTS 490; New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 62. Similarly Barker: Justinian conceived of himself as a type of Solomon, “rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem” (“Life-Bearing Spring,” 127).

importantly is the fact that the *Nea*'s dedication seems to have coincided with and possibly even inaugurated the celebration of Mary's entrance into the Jerusalem temple, an event first attested in PJ.

Traditionally celebrated on November 21 (December 4 in the Julian calendar), it is commemorated as "The Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (*In Presentatione Beatae Mariae Virginis*)" in the West, and "The Entrance of the Most-Holy *Theotokos* (Εἵσοδος τῆς Παναγίας Θεοτόκου)" in the East, where it is one of the Twelve Great Feasts (Δωδεκάορτον). In the Greek Orthodox *Festal Menaion* (*FM*), the liturgies for the Εἵσοδος are imbued with imagery from PJ. At the start of Small Vespers, Mary's parents bring her to the temple and she is greeted by the priest: "Having received the fruit of the promise come from the Lord, today in the temple Joachim and Ann offered the Mother of God as an acceptable sacrifice; and Zacharias the great High Priest received her with his blessing" (*FM* 164).³ Moreover, light-bearing women accompany her to the temple: "The young girls rejoice today, and with their lamps in hand they go in reverence before the spiritual Lamp" (*FM* 167). Even the angel who feeds her is mentioned: "Gabriel then was sent to thee, O Virgin all-undefiled, to bring thee food" (*FM* 167).

Among the numerous parallels between them are instances where the *Festal Menaion* evidences striking elaborations of PJ. Perhaps most significant are those points at which Mary and the temple are conflated, and the Virgin herself becomes a consecrated dwelling place for the divine λόγος, one temple residing in another. During Mattins, it is said that she enters the temple so that her body might be made ready for the task of receiving

³ Numbers refer to pages in *The Festal Menaion* (trans. Mother Mary and Kallistos Ware; London: Faber and Faber, 1969).

God: “Today the living Temple of the great King enters the temple to be prepared as a divine dwelling place for Him” (*FM* 174). At other points, she is called “the heavenly Tabernacle” (*FM* 184), “a sacred vessel” (*FM* 186), “the living Ark of God” (*FM* 190), and finally, “the Holy of Holies” (*FM* 192).

At the close of Mattins, the Virgin celebrated previously as entering the inner sanctum is revealed as its functional equivalent: “Today the Virgin without blemish is led to the temple, to become the habitation of God the King of all, who sustains our life. Today as a three-year-old victim of sacrifice the most pure Sanctuary is led into the Holy of Holies. To her let us cry out with the angel: Hail! thou who alone art blessed among women” (*FM* 194).⁴ The image of Mary as herself a type of temple, let alone the holy of holies, is captivating, especially in light of the seminal definition of the First Council of Ephesus (431) whereby she was declared *Θεοτόκος*.⁵ Coupled with PJ’s account of the entrance, this definition engenders quite naturally those developments evident in the liturgies of the *FM*. While it is unclear whether the author intends such imagery, the notion of Mary as temple is a striking example of PJ’s reception history, and it illustrates one of the ways that its narrative enters the popular imagination.

⁴ Similarly in the *Armenian Gospel of the Infancy*, after Mary consents to the message given by the angel at the annunciation, “she became a holy and undefiled temple and a dwelling place for [God the Word]” (5.9; Terian, *Armenian*, 25).

⁵ The definition (in Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* [London: Sheed & Ward, 1990], 1:59) reads: “If anyone does not confess Emmanuel to be truly God, and that because of this the Holy Virgin is God-Bearer (for she bore in fleshly fashion the Word of God enfleshed), let him be anathema (ἔι τις οὐχ ὁμολογεῖ Θεὸν εἶναι κατὰ ἀλήθειαν τὸν Ἐμμανουὴλ καὶ διὰ τοῦτο Θεοτόκον τὴν ἁγίαν παρθένον [γεγέννηκε γὰρ σαρκικῶς σάρκα γεγονότα τὸν ἐκ Θεοῦ λόγον], ἀνάθεμα ἔστω).”

3.2. The Author and the Text

Hypotheses regarding Mary's temple-residence are legion. Amann compares her to a sort of altar: "She is not a woman of flesh and bone, but is already a consecrated spiritual creature. Her place is not in ordinary life, but can only be within the holy of holies; and this is where she lives, where she receives the food of angels."⁶ Subsequent scholarship may be divided into three strands: first, that the episode is historically problematic because it features a female living in the temple; second, that it exists in order to stress Mary's remarkable upbringing; and third, that it validates the claim that the purity she enjoys from her infancy is not jeopardized in the course of her childhood.

3.2.1. Ignorance of Temple Practice

The notion that this episode betrays an ignorance of temple practice is standard currency. It is cited frequently as evidence that its author was a non-Jew, or at the very least that he or she was a Jew residing outside Palestine.⁷ Van der Horst communicates succinctly

⁶ Amann, *Protévangile*, 205.

⁷ The matter is often framed in similar if not identical language. So Cullmann: "We cannot deduce a Jewish-Christian origin for the author from the context. On the contrary, ignorance of the geography of Palestine and of Jewish customs ... could point rather to a non-Jew" ("Infancy Gospels," 423-24). Also Stephen Benko: "The work betrays serious ignorance of Palestinian geography and Jewish customs" (*The Virgin Goddess: Studies in the Pagan and Christian Roots of Mariology* [SHR 59; Leiden: Brill, 1993], 200). Similarly Gambero: "The author of PJ was a non-Jew or a Jew living outside of Palestine, since knowledge of Jewish customs in the text is limited" (*Mary and the Fathers of the Church: The Blessed Virgin Mary in Patristic Thought* [trans. Thomas Buffer; San Francisco: Ignatius, 1999], 99). Likewise Elliott: The author "is not likely to have been a Jew: there is in PJ a great ignorance not only of Palestinian geography but also of Jewish customs" (*Apocryphal New Testament*, 49). Finally Ehrman and Plêse (although they do not refer *specifically* to the episode in question): PJ "was probably not written by a Jew in Palestine—or if it was, it was by a Jew who was remarkably ignorant of both Palestinian geography ... and Jewish customs" (*Apocryphal Gospels*, 35).

the conventional scholarly attitude toward it: “We need spill no ink on the utter historical improbability of a young girl in Temple-service in Jerusalem.”⁸

In the HB/LXX, one’s ability to serve in the temple is restricted. At the start of Lev 16, God instructs Moses: “Tell your brother Aaron not to come just at any time into the sanctuary inside the curtain (קדש מבית לפרכת/τὸ ἅγιον ἐσώτερον τοῦ καταπετάσματος) before the mercy seat that is upon the ark, or he will die” (16:2). When Aaron *does* enter the sanctuary, he must do so in a specific way:

He shall put on the holy linen tunic, and shall have the linen undergarments next to his body, fasten the linen sash, and wear the linen turban; these are the holy vestments. He shall bathe his body in water, and then put them on. He shall take from the congregation of the people of Israel two male goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering. (Lev 16:3-4)

Mary’s presence in the sanctuary is therefore problematic on at least two levels: first, as a female descendent of David, i.e., a Judahite, she is neither a Levite nor a “son” in any sense of the term; and second, she does not appear to exercise any priestly role. While the author does seem to envision her as a sort of sacrificial offering, there is no indication that she is the one doing the sacrificing.⁹

⁸ Van der Horst, “Sex, Birth, Purity,” 61. So also Brown, on Anna in Luke 2:36-38: “Subsequent Gentile Christian tradition, perhaps influenced by the legend in the *Protevangelium of James* 7-8 that Mary was brought as a child to the altar of the Temple and reared in the Temple confines, read Luke to mean that women lived in the Temple; and that is very dubious” (*Birth*, 467).

⁹ Menahem Haran frames the matter thus: “Who is entitled to officiate in the priesthood? ... Aaron and his sons, who constitute a single and singular family within the tribe of Levi. In order to carry out their cultic functions they are dressed in priestly vestments, which are considered an inseparable part of the tabernacle appurtenances ..., and they are anointed with the sacred oil, as are all the tabernacle vessels ... Henceforth, Aaron and his sons are integrated into the concrete, contagious holiness of the tabernacle” (*Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel: An Inquiry into the Character of Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978], 58-59).

The author's description of the sanctuary itself arouses equal curiosity. Moses receives instructions for building the desert tabernacle in Exod 26:33-34: "You shall hang the curtain under the clasps, and bring the ark of the covenant in there, within the curtain (כַּרְתִּים/καταπέτασμα); and the curtain shall separate for you the holy place (קֹדֶשׁ/τοῦ ἁγίου) from the most holy (קֹדֶשׁ הַקֳּדָשִׁים/τοῦ ἁγίου τῶν ἁγίων). You shall put the mercy seat on the ark of the covenant in the most holy place (קֹדֶשׁ הַקֳּדָשִׁים/τῷ ἁγίῳ τῶν ἁγίων)."¹⁰ Two characteristics define this space from the outset: it is separated from the rest of the tabernacle by a curtain (or veil); and it is where the ark, symbolizing the presence of YHWH, is kept. But the author of PJ mentions neither of these details in the account of Mary's entrance into and residence in the holy of holies.¹¹

It is possible that here the author shows an intentional disregard for rather than an ignorance of temple practices: perhaps he or she is less interested in the historicity of the events narrated than in their significance for his or her portrait of Mary. And in this sense the issue is less whether Mary could have lived in the Jerusalem temple than what the author

¹⁰ The Hebrew designates a superlative relationship rather than a specific label, i.e., this is *the holiest* of holy places. LXX translators render the idiomatic expression literally, and it becomes a formal designation. The phrase occurs twenty-two times in the HB (in Exod 26:33-34; Lev 21:22; Num 4:4, 19; 18:9-10; 1 Kings 6:16; 7:50; 8:6; Ezek 41:4; 42:13; 44:13; Ezra 2:63; Neh 7:65; 1 Chr 6:34; 2 Chr 3:8, 10; 4:22; 5:7; 31:14). Similar constructions include "servant of servants (עַבְדֵי עַבְדִּים)," i.e., "the lowliest servant" (in Gen 9:25); "Sabbath of Sabbaths (שַׁבַּת שַׁבָּתוֹן)," i.e., "an ultimate day of rest" (in Exod 31:15); "God of gods (אֱלֹהֵי הָאֱלֹהִים)," i.e., "the most powerful God" (in Deut 10:17); "vanity of vanities (הַבִּלְבָּלִים)," i.e., "utterly vain" (in Qoh 1:2); "Song of Songs (שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים)," i.e., "the best song ever" (in Song 1:1).

¹¹ The ark is explained easily: this vessel was taken from the temple during the Babylonian sack of Jerusalem and subsequent destruction of the first temple in 586 B.C.E., and its absence from the second temple is well attested. Josephus states, for example, that there was "nothing at all (οὐδὲν ἔλαω)" in the innermost part of the temple (*J.W.* 5.219). The lack of a veil, on the other hand, is problematic. Only later does the author of PJ mention this otherwise prominent piece of the temple's furnishings, and even then, it is with reference to Mary's role in its *creation* (PJ 10). I shall address the matter of the veil further in Chapter Four.

intends to convey by placing her there. I address two related possibilities in the following sections: that her ability to dwell in the temple is a concrete expression of her purity; and that the temple serves to protect her from defilement.

3.2.2. Indication of Purity

Zervos acknowledges the strangeness of Mary's residence in the temple: "Normally the high priest alone, the holiest human in Israel, is allowed to enter the Holy of Holies once a year on the day of atonement, and even he must perform certain ritual acts to prepare for this occasion."¹² That Mary exists in this space is precisely the point: "These special circumstances of her birth and childhood certainly indicate that in PJ Mary is presented as being in a condition of heightened ritual purity which is required of those entering the temple."¹³ That is, by indicating that she lives in the temple, and indeed in the holy of holies, the author upholds her purity as truly beyond compare, even surpassing the high priest.

Hock classifies the entire episode, along with the material immediately prior to it, under the rubric of "upbringing (*ἀνατροφή*)," a characteristic of *encomiastic* literature:

Mary's extraordinary *ἀνατροφή* receives detailed treatment. Special attention, for example, is given to the efforts of Anna to raise her daughter in purity by transforming her bedroom into a sanctuary (6:4-5), and this purity is only intensified when Mary is taken at three years of age to the temple (7:4-10), where, until she is twelve, she is fed by the hand of a heavenly messenger (8:2). This divine *ἀνατροφή*, in fact, is especially praiseworthy and receives special emphasis because it becomes

¹² Zervos, "An Early Non-Canonical Annunciation Story," 690.

¹³ Ibid., 682.

thematic, used throughout the narrative as a shorthand way of referring to her extraordinary upbringing (13:7; 15:11; 19:8).

Mary's ἀνατροφή ends when she turns twelve and is forced to leave, at which point the author takes up the next topic: her "adult pursuits, skills, and habits (ἐπιτηδεύματα καὶ τέχνη καὶ νόμοι)."¹⁴

Foskett agrees that Mary's childhood in the temple is an indication of her exceptional purity, but she also cites the problematic nature of this claim: "The narrative continues to chronicle Mary's *anastrophe* with a development that reveals ignorance of Jewish cultic traditions: Joachim and Anna bring the three-year-old Mary to actually live 'in the temple of the Lord.' " In her view, the account is a continuation of the material cataloging her time spent in the sanctuary constructed by Anna: "Moving from the shelter of a bedchamber-sanctuary to the very temple of the Lord, separated from anything common or unclean, eating a heavenly diet, and interacting only with the religious elite, Mary emerges as a holy child."¹⁵

3.2.3. Insurance/Preservation of Purity

According to Vuong, Mary's "exceptional upbringing is further enhanced when [she] takes up her home in the Temple of the Lord, is given access to the Holy of Holies, and is even fed by the hands of heavenly angels."¹⁶ And the confines of the temple serve to *preserve* as well as accentuate Mary's purity: "While in the Temple, Mary's continued ritual purity is

¹⁴ Hock, *Infancy Gospels*, 18.

¹⁵ Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 146-48.

¹⁶ Vuong, *Accessing*, 56.

even ensured by an angel, who feeds her heavenly food. The implication is clear: her ritual purity surpasses even that of the Temple priests, who must refrain from approaching the altar at the times when they contract the normal ritual impurities that arise from daily life.”

¹⁷

In his study of the ostensibly Jewish aspects of PJ, Timothy J. Horner suggests that Mary’s age when her parents bring her to the temple is noteworthy: “One of the underlying assumptions of the Mishnah is that if a child loses her virginity before the age of three, her hymen will spontaneously regenerate ... after a girl turns three and a day, she becomes a Ketannah [‘little one’] and in a purely physical sense she is more vulnerable to defilement. Now she must be protected lest she lose her status as a virgin.”¹⁸ Horner maintains that “the Mishnah seems to assume that any young girl who came into Judaism from outside ... should be considered violated. If she is younger than three, her hymen will regenerate; if older, then she is no longer a virgin.”¹⁹ The significance of Mary’s entering the temple at the age of three (and not two) is therefore that it eliminates the possibility of any future suspicion about her earliest years: “If it was assumed that only children from non-Jewish environments needed to be rescued before three years and a day, then Mary’s dedication to the temple *before* three might appear suspect.”²⁰

¹⁷ Ibid., 131.

¹⁸ Horner, “Jewish Aspects of the Protoevangelium of James,” *J ECS* 12 (2004): 321. He cites as evidence *Niddah* 5.4: “ ‘If she is younger than this [three years and a day], it is as if one puts a finger in the eye’ (i.e., it will cause temporary discomfort, but will not have any permanent physical effect).”

¹⁹ Ibid. Citing *Ketubbot* 1.2-3: “The Ketubah [bride price] of a virgin is two hundred dinars and of a widow one mina [half as much] ... the Ketubah of a female proselyte, captive, or slave who was redeemed, proselytized, or freed under the age of three and a day is one mina.”

²⁰ Ibid., 322.

While Horner may overstate his case concerning the relationship of the Mishnah to PJ, his conclusion illustrates well the twofold function of Mary's temple residence as witness to and insurance of her purity: the temple "is presumably the safest environment in which to grow up ... if we assume that *Prot. Jas.* is concerned to protect Mary's virginity during a time in her life when she is most vulnerable to defilement, then her dedication to the temple at the age of three, not two, ensures that there is no possibility of compromise, no hint of defilement, no reason to doubt her purity from day one."²¹ In short, Mary is *able* to live in the temple because she is already pure; that she *remains* there for the duration of her childhood ensures that her purity will be safeguarded.

3.3. Literary Analysis of PJ 7-9

Mary's sojourn in the temple marks the end of her parents' presence in the narrative and the beginning of her life with Joseph. The episode is a prime illustration of the author's concern with Mary's purity and its preservation: she is shielded from the outside world as she journeys to the temple, isolated in the holy of holies while she lives in there, and assigned a custodian when the time comes for her to leave. But the episode closes on an uncertain note, when her guardian (Joseph) neglects his duties so that he can continue working at his trade.

There are at least three reasons for dividing the material this way. In terms of location, the temple is the focus of these chapters; all of the characters are presented as traveling to, living in, or departing from it. Second, the theme of safekeeping is dominant,

²¹ Ibid.

and several caretakers are charged with Mary's protection: Anna and Joachim (PJ 7:1-2), the daughters of the Hebrews (PJ 7:4-6), the priests and the temple itself (PJ 8), Joseph (PJ 9:11), and God (PJ 9:12). Finally, in terms of structure, Mary's journey to and from the temple the text forms an *inclusio*: at the beginning of PJ 7, she is brought to the temple from her home by her parents, and at the end of PJ 9, Joseph brings her to her new home.

3.3.1. Mary as Sacrificial Offering

When Anna receives word that she will have a child, she promises, "As the Lord God lives, whether I bear a male or a female, I will bring it (αὐτό) as a gift to the Lord my God, and it will serve him for all the days of its life" (PJ 4:2). On Mary's second birthday, Joachim states that the time has come to satisfy this vow (PJ 7:1). Anna responds, "Let us wait (ἀναμείνωμεν) until the third year so that she will not miss [her] father and mother" (PJ 7:2). Joachim concedes quickly: "Let us wait (ἀναμείνωμεν)" (PJ 7:3).

By opening the story thus, the author calls to mind a similar dialogue between Elkanah and Hannah in 1 Samuel.²² They, like Mary's parents, are without children (1 Sam 1:6). Hannah prays to God for a son and commits him to a life of service as a Nazirite (1 Sam 1:11). God hears her prayer and she gives birth to Samuel (1 Sam 1:19-20). When Elkanah journeys to make his yearly sacrifice, Hannah promises, "As soon as the child is weaned, I will bring him ..." (1 Sam 1:21-22). He reminds her that her child is a gift from God, the consequence of a prayerful oath: "Do what seems best to you, wait until you have weaned him; only—may the LORD establish his word" (1 Sam 1:23).

²² So Smid, *Protevangeliū Jacobi*, 57.

Joachim is similar to Elkanah in that both are men of generous sacrifice: Elkanah sacrifices on behalf of both his wives, Hannah receiving a double portion (1 Sam 1:4), while Joachim offers gifts on his own behalf as well as on behalf of “all the people” (PJ 1:1). They are distinct in that only one takes personal responsibility for his spouse’s pledge. After he speaks in 1 Sam 1:23, Elkanah recedes from the narrative, and the dedication of Samuel becomes Hannah’s responsibility. But Joachim adopts Anna’s promise as his own, transforming her initial “I will bring (προσάξω)” (PJ 4:2) into a communal “let us bring (ἀνάξωμεν)” (PJ 7:1).

Joachim assembles an entourage when Mary turns three: “Let us call (καλέσωμεν) for the undefiled daughters of the Hebrews (τὰς θυγατέρας τῶν Ἑβραίων τὰς ἀμιάντους). Let each of them take a lamp and let them stand burning (ἔστωσαν καιόμεναι) so that the child might not turn back and her heart be taken captive outside the temple of the Lord” (PJ 7:4-6). This is the second time that these “daughters” appear. The first is when Anna summons them to Mary’s bedroom-sanctuary: “She called (ἐκάλεσε) for the undefiled daughters of the Hebrews (τὰς θυγατέρας τῶν Ἑβραίων τὰς ἀμιάντους), and they distracted (διεπλάνων) her” (PJ 6:5).²³ In both cases, their responsibility is straightforward: diversion from anything that might

²³ My rendering of διαπλανᾶν as “to distract” attempts to capture its most natural sense of “to lead astray” or “to deceive” (LSJ, s.v. διαπλανάω [p. 407]). Hock translates it as “to amuse,” noting that some MSS substitute διακονεῖν, “to serve” (*Infancy Gospels*, 43). Daniels proposes an alternate reading: διαπλύνειν, “to wash” (“Greek Manuscript Tradition,” 2:226-27). Smid, citing Arnold Meyer (“Protevangelium des Jakobus,” in *Handbuch zu den Neutestamentlichen Apokryphen* [ed. Edgar Hennecke; Tübingen: Mohr, 1904]): this usage perhaps reflects “a late Greek change of meaning, which has turned ‘to entice, allure, lead astray’ into ‘to amuse’ ” (*Protevangelium Jacobi*, 51). De Strycker, by contrast: the sense of διαπλανᾶν is illustrated well by the typical Latin rendering, *divertere*, which corresponds to the French *divertir*. He understands the daughters’ “amusement” of Mary as a “diversion,” a “leading astray” of her attention (*Forme*, 303).

threaten Mary's purity. They are mysterious not because of what they *do*, but because, as Hock notes, "just who they are supposed to be" is uncertain.²⁴

Joachim and Anna's referring to them *collectively* identifies them as a formal group or, as Smid suggests, a "certain class." Their designation as ἀμύαντοι implies that they are virgins.²⁵ De Strycker argues that "the author seems to represent them as a separate category (*une catégorie à part*) like that of the consecrated Christian virgins."²⁶ Thus, the label does

²⁴ So Hock: "The point ... is to underscore that Mary's first years were spent in the purest seclusion of her mother's bedroom" (*Infancy Gospels*, 43). Similarly Vuong: "Even when she is outside of her home-turned-sanctuary, Mary is completely surrounded by the pure; her path is clean and her destination is the Temple. Mary literally transitions from one sacred space to another without any lapse that might subject her to any impurity" (*Accessing*, 99). Also Foskett, "Virgin Conceived," 103-4. Later in PJ, the high priest will send for a similar group: "Call (καλέσατε) for me the undefiled virgins from the tribe of David (τὰς παρθένους τὰς ἀμύαντους ἀπὸ τῆς φυλῆς τοῦ Δαυὶδ)" (PJ 10:2). But these women do not distract Mary from anything. Rather, they work alongside her as fellow spinners.

²⁵ Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi*, 51. Similarly Vuong, that ἀμύαντος suggests virginity and that they only interact with Mary when they are not menstruating: "When we read *Prot. Jas.* 6:5 in terms of the text's own concern for the Temple and ritual purity rather than only through the lens of later Christian views of Mary, the more plausible interpretation may be to understand Mary's companions as 'undefiled,' not just by virtue of being virginal, but also by virtue of not associating with Mary during the period of their own menstruation; following this reading, the reference to their undefiled status would evoke the earlier reference to Anna's postpartum purification in *Prot. Jas.* 5:9, wherein the intention is to also keep the infant Mary away from the ritual impurities of blood-flow" (*Accessing*, 94). Their status is more explicit in the *Armenian Gospel of the Infancy*, in which Joachim says, "Ask to send for all the virgins who are dedicated to God among the daughters of the Hebrews" (3.1; Terian, *Armenian*, 12).

²⁶ De Strycker, *Forme*, 91. Smid wonders if this thesis is perhaps "antedated" (*Protevangelium Jacobi*, 51), that is, anachronistic. But de Strycker does not claim that the daughters are consecrated Christian virgins, only that the *category* is similar. While a specific class of undefiled Hebrew women is not attested in either the LXX or NT, the concept is not *entirely* foreign to literature contemporary with PJ. In *Joseph and Aseneth*, a Jewish novel dating to the second century C.E., Aseneth is "a tall, beautiful, and graceful eighteen-year-old virgin (παρθένος), more beautiful than every virgin in the land." Though an Egyptian, Aseneth "shared no similarity with the daughters of the Egyptians (τῶν θυγατέρων τῶν Αἰγυπτίων), but was in every respect like the daughters of the Hebrews (ταῖς θυγατράσι τῶν Ἑβραίων)" (*Jos. Asen.* 1.6-7). The identity of this group in *Jos. Asen.* is about as clear as the one in PJ. Because Aseneth's defining characteristic in this instance is that she is a virgin, and because she is like the daughters of the Hebrews "in every respect," it can be inferred that these daughters are virgins as well. And like Mary, Aseneth is surrounded by women responsible for her protection: they live with her in the tower, they serve (διακονεῖν) her, and they come down (καταβαίνειν) with her when she goes out to meet Joseph (*Jos. Asen.* 2.10-11; 19.1). Context shows that these virgins constitute (at least in part) the group identified by the author as the daughters of

not apply to all virgin women living in Palestine, but to those who are identified as virginal in some “official” capacity. In this regard, these women are without comparison in either the HB/LXX or NT.²⁷ As there is little to no evidence to support the notion that a determinate group of virgin women existed in Israel in the late first century B.C.E., this group remains enigmatic. It is entirely plausible that the author here superimposes his or her own memory of an order of consecrated virgins in the second century, but even so, their task is the same: to surround the young Virgin and guard her from impurity.

Joachim’s assumption of Anna’s vow casts Mary’s being brought to the temple as a sacrificial offering. Two characteristics are used to introduce his character: he is “exceedingly wealthy (πλούσιος σφόδρα)” and he doubles the gifts (δῶρα) that he offers (προσφέρειν) to the Lord (PJ 1:1-2). What catalyzes the narrative is his being told that, on account of his childlessness, he is not allowed to offer (προσφέρειν) gifts in the temple, at least not until others have offered theirs first (PJ 1:5).²⁸ Joachim, now “exceedingly grieved (ἐλυπήθη

the Hebrews, and in this regard, both Mary and Aseneth are portrayed as similar to the women who guard them, perhaps even as occupying a position within their ranks. Notably, that the author of *Jos. Asen.* refers to “the daughters of the Hebrews” in a fashion similar to the author of PJ does not solve the question of their identity.

²⁷ The closest verbal parallel in the LXX is Jdt 10:12, where Judith refers to herself as a “daughter of the Hebrews (θυγάτηρ τῶν Εβραίων).” Her self-identification in this instance does not signal a special status on her part; only that she is a Hebrew. Smid observes that Luke’s description of Elizabeth as being “from the daughters of Aaron (ἐκ τῶν θυγατέρων Ἀαρών)” (Luke 1:5) employs similar terminology (*Protevangelium Jacobi*, 51). But like Judith, Elizabeth’s designation as a daughter of Aaron is a claim to her ancestry, not a particular status. So Green: “The setting of the events of Luke’s birth narrative ... is one of struggle during the process of the consolidation of the Jews under Roman rule at the hand of a king noted for his tyranny. Into this context Luke introduces Zechariah and Elizabeth, a priestly couple” (*Luke*, 64). Foskett, on the importance of ancestry to the author: “Just as the infant Mary keeps only the company of the undefiled daughters of the Hebrews, it is a Hebrew midwife whom Joseph brings to witness the birth of Jesus. Throughout her life Mary interacts only with the people of Israel. Even the doubting Salome is a descendant of Abraham. Thus all of Mary’s relationships are determined by *genos* and cult status” (“Virgin Conceived,” 312).

²⁸ Commonly labeled “Joachim’s expulsion from the temple,” the event is less an expulsion than a demotion: he is still allowed to offer his gifts, but he must wait until others have offered theirs.

σφόδρα),” retreats to the wilderness to pray and fast (PJ 1:9-11).²⁹ He only resumes offering (προσφέρειν) gifts in the temple when he hears the news of his wife’s pregnancy (PJ 5:1-4). While he does not sacrifice again once Mary is born (in PJ 5:5), the language that characterized his earlier activities reappears when she turns one. Hosting a banquet at his home in celebration of this event, he invites the temple officials and all the people of Israel, presents (προσφέρειν) her to the priests, and they bless her (PJ 6:7-9). Mary has become Joachim’s sacrifice.³⁰

That Mary is to be understood in this way is reinforced by his words to Anna: “Let us bring her up (ἀνάξωμεν) to the temple of the Lord so that we might return the promise that we promised, lest the Lord become angry with us and our gift (δῶρον) become unacceptable” (PJ 7:1). His reference to Mary as δῶρον echoes his initial introduction (PJ 1:2) and his earlier travails in the temple (PJ 1:5): the one who was prevented from offering gifts in the temple because of his childlessness will now offer his only child as a gift to that temple. What is more, his “let us bring her up,” followed by his and Anna’s ascending (ἀναβαίνειν) the temple mount in PJ 7:6, recalls his final trip to the temple before the birth of Mary, after which “he goes down from the temple of the Lord (κατέβη ἐκ τοῦ ναοῦ κυρίου)” and returns home (PJ 5:4).³¹

²⁹ Anna is similarly distressed by her childlessness and inability to worship in the temple: “Anna also was exceedingly grieved (ἐλυπήθη σφόδρα).” Instead of banishing herself to the wilderness, she puts on her wedding dress (τὰ ἱμάτια τὰ νυμφικά), departs to her garden, and laments her barrenness (PJ 2:7-3:8).

³⁰ So Vuong, “Exploring,” 426-29.

³¹ Verbs prefixed with ἀνα- and κατα- (signifying ascent and descent, respectively) refer commonly to persons traveling to and from Jerusalem or the temple, often with the purpose of offering sacrifices there. This reflects not only that Jerusalem is situated on elevated terrain, but that a pilgrimage to Jerusalem constitutes a sort of spiritual ascension for the pilgrim. Καταβαίνειν is admittedly versatile in PJ, referring to Joachim’s trip from the wilderness (1:11; 4:5), Anna’s going

Mary's first birthday foreshadows her presentation, and her home is depicted as a quasi-temple from which the guests descend after witnessing a sacrificial offering: "They went down (κατέβησαν) celebrating and praised (ἐδόξασαν) the God of Israel" (PJ 6:15). The sacrificial language is more explicit in the actual presentation: Joachim and Anna go up (ἀναβαίνειν) to the temple, and Mary is again received (δέχεσθαι) and blessed (εὐλογεῖν) by the priest. Like the guests at the banquet, her parents descend (καταβαίνειν) glorifying God (PJ 8:1). But what they leave behind is no ordinary sacrifice. She does not die on the altar; she dances (καταχορεύειν) (PJ 7:10).³²

The scene ends with a brief comment: "The whole house of Israel loved her (ἡγάπησεν αὐτὴν πᾶς οἶκος Ἰσραήλ)" (PJ 7:10). The first and only instance in the narrative where anyone is said to love (ἀγαπᾶν) or be loved by another, it is unclear what captures the people's endearment.³³ Smid observes that the language is reminiscent of LXX 1 Sam 18:16, where "all of Israel and Judah loved David (πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ καὶ Ἰουδᾶς ἡγάπα τὸν Δαυὶδ)" on account of his military victories.³⁴ But David's successes and the people's love are not the

down into her garden (2:8), and later by Joseph with respect to the Hebrew midwife he finds coming down from the hill country (19:1) (see also PJ 4:4; 6:15; 8:1). In *Ps.-Mt.*, Mary herself ascends (*ascendere*) the steps of the temple when she arrives with her parents (4.1).

³² Smid interprets Mary's dancing as signifying her willingness to be secluded in the temple (*Protevangelium Jacobi*, 62). Hock's interpretation is similar: "That [she] *danced* may indicate that she has gladly accepted her new home" (*Infancy Gospels*, 45 n. 7:10). Foskett contrasts her actions with those of Jesus in Luke when he is accidentally left in the temple by his parents: "Unlike the boy Jesus who actively engaged those who were teaching at the temple ..., Mary delights the temple priests by dancing on the steps of the altar." Additionally, Mary's dancing signifies the new level of freedom that she enjoys: "In contrast to her former home environment, she moves about freely in the temple. The feet that were not permitted to touch the ground now dance on the very steps of the altar" ("Virgin Conceived," 104-5).

³³ Vuong suggests that the love Mary receives "reaffirms her worthiness to live in the Temple" (Vuong, *Accessing*, 101).

³⁴ Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi*, 62. Also LXX 1 Sam 18:28: "And Saul saw that the Lord was with David and that all of Israel loved him (πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ ἡγάπα αὐτόν)." Καταχορεύειν refers often to

result of his own prowess; they are consequences of his anointing, the moment at which “the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon [him]” and departed from Saul (1 Sam 16:13-14).

That Mary begins to dance directly after God showers her with grace (PJ 7:9) links the two activities. And in this sense, Amann is certainly correct in interpreting the people’s love as directed, not toward Mary herself but toward the divine favor that is manifested through her actions.³⁵

3.3.2. Nine Years in the Temple

Mary’s time in the temple is liminal, a stopover instead of a permanent residency. The brevity with which her nine-year stay is chronicled makes this clear: “Mary was in the temple of the Lord, fed as a dove, and she received food from the hand of an angel” (PJ 8:2).³⁶ The account is augmented in *Ps.-Mt.*, where her schedule (*regula*) is outlined in more detail: she prays each morning until nine o’clock and she weaves (*nere*) from nine to three, at which point she resumes praying and does not cease until she receives her food from the angel (*Ps.-Mt.* 6.1-2). PJ shares with *Ps.-Mt.* this final element, but its account of Mary’s childhood in the temple is otherwise vague: she simply *is* (εἶναι) there (PJ 8:2).

When they learn that she is pregnant, Joseph and the high priest reveal that Mary’s years in the temple were spent in a specific location, as both refer to her separately as “one

dances of triumph (so Pollux, *Onom.* 4.84; Aelian, *Nat. an.* 1.30).

³⁵ So Amann, *Protévangile*, 207. The high priest refers to Mary’s dancing again later, when she and Joseph are being questioned about her pregnancy: “ ‘You, who heard [the angels’] hymns and danced (χορεύσασα) in their presence, why have you done this?’ ” (PJ 15:12).

³⁶ In the *Armenian Gospel of the Infancy*, she remains there for twelve years, not nine (3.1; 4.1).

nourished in the holy of holies (ἀνατραφεῖσα εἰς τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἁγίων)” (PJ 13:7; 15:11).³⁷ Her existence in this *sanctum sanctorum* is prefigured by her time at home. While she was still with her parents, Mary’s confinement to the sanctuary (ἁγίασμα) in her bedroom, though extreme, was not absolute: Anna must at one point take her back up (ἀναρπάζειν) to the sanctuary after she has received a blessing from the priests (PJ 6:10). By contrast, there is no indication that she ever leaves the sanctuary in the temple, even for food. The cursory “Mary was (ἦν) in the temple of the Lord” (PJ 8:2) is understood not as the author’s lack of interest in what Mary *did* while she was there, but as indicating that she doesn’t really *do* anything other than *be*.

Her being fed “as a dove (ὡσεὶ περιστερά)” (PJ 8:2) indicates that she is there as a pure sacrifice and that her presence is unbroken. Because turtledoves/doves are the only birds suitable for sacrificial offering in the HB/LXX (Lev 1:14), Vuong suggests that “the reference to the dove seems to strengthen the metaphor of Mary as a sacrificial gift.”³⁸ That she receives her food directly from the hand of an angel ensures that the purity she enjoyed during the first three years of her life continues while she lives in the holy of holies: just as

³⁷ In Maximus the Confessor’s *Life of the Virgin* (hereafter, *Life*), she sits “to the right of the altar in the Holy of Holies, which is truly regarded as being to the right of God” (7; Shoemaker, *Life*, 41).

³⁸ Moreover, the dove is a common symbol of innocence and the Holy Spirit in the NT Gospels (Matt 3:16; 10:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32) (so Vuong, *Accessing*, 102). Also Smid, *Protevangeliū Jacobi*, 64. The description of Mary as “dovelike,” coupled with the events leading up to her presentation, may also be an allusion to LXX Song 6:9: “My dove (περιστερά), my perfect one (τελεία), is the only one. The only one of her mother, she is the chosen one (ἐκλεκτή) to the one who bore her. Daughters (θυγατέρες) saw her and will bless (μακαριοῦσιν) her; queens and concubines will praise (αἰνέσουσιν) her.” The image may echo the transformative aspect of a concept that Andrei A. Orlov dubs “pteromorphic angelology” (see, e.g., Orlov, “The Pteromorphic Angelology of the *Apocalypse of Abraham*,” *CBQ* 71 [2009]: 830-42). Already in Philo (*Somn.* 2.189) we find the idea that the priest takes on a sort of angelic form (i.e., something between human and divine) when he enters the holy of holies.

her mother prevented her from eating anything unclean (PJ 6:4), so now Mary's diet is regulated similarly, albeit to a more rigorous degree.³⁹

That Mary lives *exclusively* in the holy of holies is also suggested by the priests' reaction to her turning twelve and the description of the events that ensue. They say to one another, "What, therefore, are we to do with her, lest she pollute (μιάνη) the sanctuary (ἁγίασμα) of our Lord?" (PJ 8:4). Whereas previously the ἁγίασμα referred to the sanctuary in Anna's bedroom (PJ 6:4, 10), now it refers to the temple sanctuary that is in danger of being polluted by Mary herself (PJ 8:3-4), or more specifically, by her entrance into womanhood.⁴⁰ Maintaining the purity of this space would be simple if it were possible to move her to another location in the complex or to preclude her from entering the sanctuary once she begins to menstruate. But the priests' response to the problem shows that this is not possible: Mary's place is the holy of holies.

The priests command the high priest to enter the holy of holies and pray concerning Mary's fate, which implies that they are not permitted to enter the space. They say to him, "You have stood at the altar (θυσιαστήριον) of the Lord. Go in and pray about her (περὶ αὐτῆς), and whatever the Lord God should reveal to you, we will do this." He enters the holy of holies and begins to pray "about her (περὶ αὐτῆς)" (PJ 8:5-6). While the *περί* in both cases

³⁹ So Vuong: "Lest the reader be shocked by the image of a female child sitting so near the altar, the appeal to her angelic diet serves to underline her special purity and the divine approval of her dwelling in the temple" (*Accessing*, 102).

⁴⁰ Standing behind this scene, according to van der Horst, "is the Jewish rule that a girl is estimated to enter puberty ... early in her thirteenth year and that for that reason maturity was regarded as beginning legally from the age of twelve years and one day ... Till the age of twelve she was regarded as a minor (*tinoret*); from twelve till twelve and a half as a girl or a young woman (*na'arah*), from twelve and a half as an adult (*bogeret*). It was in the middle period that she was expected to start menstruating. It is this middle period that Mary has now reached" ("Sex, Birth, Purity," 61).

is *referential* rather than *locative*, i.e., the high priests prays *concerning* Mary, not *near* or *around* her, the sense is that the high priest ventures into this space to pray about Mary because that is where Mary is.⁴¹ If this is the case, then this is the first human contact that Mary has had since her parents' departure.

The author conveys through this scene that Mary's purity, carefully guarded since her infancy, remains unchallenged by virtue of her location in the temple: with the exception of one visit near the end of her stay, she remains separated from all persons. The episode closes as a trumpet blast summons the widowers of Israel, potential "husbands" for the young Virgin.⁴² They waste no time in responding: "Behold, everyone ran (ἔδραμον)" (PJ 8:9). Mary's splendid isolation is soon to become a thing of the past.

3.3.3. The "Marriage" to Joseph

Joseph is among the widowers who assemble (PJ 8:9-9:1).⁴³ His reaction to the gathering call is enthusiastic: just as Elizabeth will later cast aside (ρίπτειν) what she is

⁴¹ By contrast, when he collects the widowers' staffs in the following scene, he does not take the staffs back to the sanctuary to pray; he simply takes them "into the temple (εἰς τὸ ἱερόν)" (PJ 9:2-3).

⁴² In Maximus the Confessor's *Life*, the summoning of the widowers is the priests' solution to a dilemma: because twelve is the age of marriage and the age at which young women are no longer allowed to live in the temple, "it seemed abominable to give over to the yoke of marriage one who had been entrusted to God, who had been ordained to be in service to the yoke of God alone." They decide, then, that she should be betrothed "to a man not ready for marriage but old and elderly and accomplished in the perfection of virtues, so that he would be a zealous guardian of her virginity" (15; Shoemaker, *Life*, 46-47).

⁴³ His introduction is brief, the assumption being that readers will be able to recognize him. One aspect of his character that receives virtually no attention in the NT, his profession, is emphasized repeatedly in PJ. Among the canonical evangelists, only Matthew calls him a carpenter (τέκτων), and even then he is identified as such indirectly: "Is this not the carpenter's son (οὐχ οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ τοῦ τέκτονος υἱός)?" (Matt 13:55). In Mark 6:3, Jesus is himself called a τέκτων, with certain variant readings adding "son of the carpenter (τοῦ τέκτονος υἱός)." In PJ, by contrast, Joseph tosses aside his

working on in order to run (τρέχειν) and greet Mary (PJ 12:4), he casts aside (ρίπτειν) a tool of his trade and runs (τρέχειν) to the temple (PJ 8:9-9:1). But his alacrity fades once he is chosen to bring Mary into his home.⁴⁴ He protests his charge, noting that he is elderly and afraid of being mocked for having so young a bride (PJ 9:8).⁴⁵

Joseph's objection makes him the only character who does not respond positively to Mary: she is welcomed and cared for by her parents (PJ 5:8), blessed by priests on four separate occasions (PJ 6:7, 9; 7:7; 12:2), and received enthusiastically by Elizabeth and the *in utero* John the Baptist (PJ 12:5). His anxiety stems not from doubt concerning his ability to guard her effectively but from a concern with how others will perceive him. And when he finally agrees to protect Mary, he does so out of fear of divine retribution, not joy (PJ 9:11).

Mary and Joseph's "marriage" in PJ is atypical in many respects. The reason for labeling it as such is the angel's earlier message to the high priest: "She will be a wife (γυνή) to whomever the Lord should show a sign" (PJ 8:8). Matthew and Luke present their relationship in more conventional terms: Mary and Joseph are engaged (μνηστεύειν), and they refrain from sexual intercourse before they are wed (Matt 1:18; Luke 1:27). The author of PJ frames the matter differently: what happens in PJ 9 is not, strictly speaking, a marriage,

carpenter's axe (σκέπαρνον) before joining the other widowers at the temple (9:1), he leaves Mary at home so that he can continue building houses (οικοδομῆσαι) (9:12), and he later returns from his building projects (οικοδομή) (13:1).

⁴⁴ The sign that God has chosen Joseph is a dove that comes out of his staff and lands on his head (PJ 9:6). In Maximus the Confessor's *Life*, the priests bring all of the staffs into the holy of holies, and "Joseph's ... blossomed and became as fruitful as Aaron's before it" (16; Shoemaker, *Life*, 47-48).

⁴⁵ His advanced age (as well as that of the other widowers) is emphasized in an Armenian translation of PJ, in which his staff (ῥάβδος) becomes a cane (4.2, 4; Terian, *Armenian*, 153). So also *Life of the Virgin* 17: "Joseph was then more than seventy years old" (17; Shoemaker, *Life*, 48).

and there is no indication here or elsewhere that the couple will ever consummate their relationship.⁴⁶

The high priest's announcement to Joseph defines their relationship: "You have been chosen by lot to take (παραλαβεῖν) the virgin of the Lord (τὴν παρθένον κυρίου) into your safekeeping (τήρησιν)" (PJ 9:7). The high priest here serves a role similar to the angel in Joseph's dream in Matthew: both attempt to convince him "to take (παραλαβεῖν)" Mary, the high priest by invoking the fear of God (φοβήθητι κύριον τὸν θεόν σου) (PJ 9:9), and the angel succeeding with the gentler "do not be afraid (μὴ φοβηθῇς)" (Matt 1:20). While the claim that Mary is a virgin is latent throughout the text, the high priest's speech is the first time she is called παρθένος. And in so categorizing her, he clarifies the terms of Joseph's stewardship: by taking her into his house *as a virgin*, Joseph is ensuring that she will remain as such.

After he returns home with Mary, Joseph's course of action is unprecedented: he leaves her alone, albeit with the promise that he will return in the future (PJ 9:12). In doing so, he reveals that while he accepts the charge given him by the high priest, he does not

⁴⁶ So Hock, *Infancy Gospels*, 49. Whether their abstinence in Matthew and Luke continues *after* they are married is a point of contention. Matthew's use of ἕως in 1:18 ("until she had borne a son") allows for the possibility that the couple engaged in a normal sexual relationship after the birth of Jesus (see Matt 2:9, 13, 15; 5:25; 10:11, 23; 13:30, 33; 16:28; 17:9; 18:30, 34; 23:39; 24:39; 26:29; 27:51, 64). So Painter: "The natural way to read this implies that Joseph did come to 'know' Mary after she bore her son, just as 'before they came together' (1:18) implies that they did not 'come together' until later" (*Just James*, 35). What is more, both Matthew and Luke refer to Jesus having brothers (ἀδελφοί) (Matt 12:46; Luke 8:19; so also Mark 3:31-32; John 7:3-10; Gal 1:19). Jesus' precise relationship to these ἀδελφοί has been articulated in various ways. Three "classic" positions are 1) that they are *actual* brothers of Jesus, sons of Mary and Joseph (the Helvidian view), 2) that they are Jesus' *cousins* (the Hieronymian view), and 3) that they are his stepbrothers, Joseph's sons from a previous marriage (the Epiphanian view). The third is almost certainly held by (and may even originate with) the author of PJ, who mentions Joseph's sons three times in the course of the narrative (PJ 9:8; 17:2; 18:1). These positions are addressed more fully in Bauckham, *Jude*, 19-32; Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 1:318-32.

realize fully what it entails. He acknowledges as much after he finds Mary pregnant: “I received (παρέλαβον) her from the temple of the Lord but didn’t protect (ἐφύλαξα) her” (PJ 13:3). His departure amounts to a blatant abandonment of the Virgin who was safeguarded carefully from the moment of her birth. Joseph charges God with her protection, but the fact remains that Mary now exists apart from those persons and structures who were previously guardians of and witnesses to her continuing purity: her mother and father, the undefiled daughters of the Hebrews, the priests, and indeed temple itself. The episode thus closes with a final transfer of responsibility: God alone is now accountable for the Virgin’s preservation.

3.4. The Reader and the Intertextual Canon

Two details of this episode are mentioned almost in passing: Mary’s receiving food from the hand of an angel and her dancing on the third step of the altar. While certainly parenthetical, they are far from peripheral. The former mirrors Anna’s regulation of her diet in the bedroom-sanctuary, and ensures that she does not leave the confines of the sanctuary for anything, thus guaranteeing that she remains utterly and perpetually pure. The latter casts her as the living sacrifice offered by her parents and as a conduit through which the people of Israel love God.

In the following sections I address several sources and traditions that layer the significance of these images. First, tales of miraculous feedings from antiquity suggest that the heavenly fare Mary enjoys is more than a commentary on and the ensuring of her purity, signifying in addition her chosen status and indicating that she is part of God’s larger salvific project. Second, instances of dancing in the HB/LXX and early Christian literature frame Mary’s dancing as a form of worship and communion with the divine. Finally, the

Muses and the Charites, Greek and Roman goddesses responsible for teaching humankind to dance and therefore commune with God, imply that Mary's dancing is somehow distinct insofar as it is performed alone. This, I shall argue, establishes her in the reader's mind as a worshiper of God *par excellence*.

3.4.1. Miraculous Feedings

Tales of important persons being fed by extraordinary means are not uncommon in antiquity. One example, recounted by the Greek historian Plutarch (ca. 46-120 C.E.), is a story in which the Vestal Virgin Rhea gives birth to twin boys who are “unusually large and beautiful (ὑπερφυεῖς μεγέθει καὶ κάλλει).”⁴⁷ When he sees them, King Amulius orders that they be cast away (ρίπτειν) (*Rom.* 3). They are put into a trough (σκάφη) and set near a river that later sweeps them up. The trough is caught in the branches of a fig tree (ἐρινεός), and as the children lie helpless on the riverbank, a she-wolf (λύκαινα) nurses them (θηλάζειν) while a woodpecker (δρυοκολάπτης) brings them food (συνεκτρέφειν) and protects them (φυλάσσειν) (*Rom.* 4).⁴⁸ They are later taken in by a swineherd (συφορβός) and given the names Romulus

⁴⁷ Plutarch attributes this story in part to Diocles of Peparethus (ca. late-fourth/early-third cent. B.C.E.), whose works are not extant. It is also recounted in Dionysius of Halicarnassus (ca. 60 B.C.E.-7 C.E.), *Ant. rom.* 1.76-83. In the story of Noah's birth in *1 Enoch*, Lamech is frightened by the appearance of his newborn son which, like Rhea's twins, is unusual: “His body was white as snow and red as a rose; the hair of his head as white as wool and his *demdema* beautiful; and as for his eyes, when he opened them the whole house glowed like the sun—(rather) the whole house glowed even more exceedingly” (106.2; *OTP* 1:86).

⁴⁸ So also Virgil (ca. 70-19 B.C.E.): “[Aeneas] had fashioned, too, the mother-wolf outstretched in the green cave of Mars; around her teats the twin boys hung playing, and mouthed their dam without fear; she, with shapely neck bent back, fondled them by turns, and moulded their limbs with her tongue” (*Aen.* 8.630-634 [Fairclough, LCL]). The wolf is enshrined in later iconography as *Lupa Capitolina*. Cristina Mazzoni comments on this image: “The she-wolf's presence on monuments, both verbal and visual, reminds us of her story as well as the ways it can be used, the array of meanings that can be produced or extracted from a single tale” (*She-Wolf: The Story of a*

and Remus (*Rom.* 6). After his brother dies, Romulus founds the city of Rome (*Rom.* 11-13).⁴⁹

Similarly, in 1 Kings Elijah rebukes Ahab for worshiping Baal and for marrying the Phoenician Jezebel and promises a drought: “As the LORD the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word” (1 Kgs 17:1).⁵⁰ Now a fugitive, he is instructed by God to hide himself by the Wadi Cherith, where he will drink water and be fed by ravens (1 Kgs 17:2-4). He does this, and “the ravens (עֲרָבִים) brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening; and he drank from the wadi” (1 Kgs 17:6). This continues until the wadi dries up (1 Kgs 17:7), at which point he travels to Zarephath and lodges with a widow, whose jug of oil and jar of meal are replenished so that they may continue to eat “for many days” (1 Kgs 17:8-16).⁵¹ Volkmar Fritz notes that “while the provision with water happens in a natural way, the provision of food points to a miracle. Ravens, which are normally regarded as scavengers and aggressive birds, serve as carriers of food.”⁵²

Roman Icon [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010], 169).

⁴⁹ So also Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. rom.* 1.72-73. cf. Diodorus Siculus (first cent. B.C.E.), *Libr.* 7.5.1; Sallust (ca. 86-35 B.C.E.), *Bell. Cat.* 6.1. Discrepancies between various accounts of Rome’s founding surveyed in T. P. Wiseman, *Remus: A Roman Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁵⁰ Because Baal is thought to be the god responsible for rain, a drought implies that he is either impotent or dead (so Choon-Leong Seow, “The First and Second Books of Kings,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible* [12 vols.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1994], 3: 126).

⁵¹ Fretheim, on the contrast between the wadi/ravens episode and Zarephath: “The wadi soon dries up for lack of rain; the natural order cannot sustain itself. But God, unlike Baal, is not dead during the dry season; God can be relied upon even for such times” (*First and Second Kings* [WEST; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999], 97). So also Seow, “1 & 2 Kings,” 127.

⁵² Fritz, *1 & 2 Kings: A Continental Commentary* [trans. Anselm Hagedorn; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003], 183. According to Fretheim, their presence casts the scene in a dangerous light: “This seems almost as risky as staying near Ahab; he is to drink from a wadi and be fed with food provided

By far the most prominent story of miraculous feeding in the HB/LXX is the provision of manna to the wilderness generation of Israel. After they leave Egypt, the people complain to Moses and Aaron about their hunger (Exod 16:3). God says, “I am going to rain bread from heaven (לחם מן השמים), and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for the day. In that way I will test (נסה) them, whether they will follow my instruction or not” (Exod 16:4).⁵³ After Moses and Aaron deliver a series of short speeches (Exod 16:6-10a), the glory of the Lord appears in the cloud (Exod 16:10b), and God again speaks to Moses: “I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread (חםל); then you shall know that I am the LORD your God’ ” (Exod 16:12).

The promise is fulfilled in two steps: quails cover the camp in the evening, and a “fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground” blankets the desert floor the next

by ravens. Ravens are not known as providers but as scavengers” (*First and Second Kings*, 97). So also Mordechai Cogan: “In ancient Mesopotamia, ravens were considered ominous creatures and are depicted among the scavengers in the Assyrian battle scenes” (*1 Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [AB 10; New York: Doubleday, 2001], 426). According to John Gray, their ability to supply Elijah with meat in the first part of this narrative is a natural consequence of the lack of water, namely, that “in the severe drought feeble beasts were being killed off by the Bedouin” (*I & II Kings* [OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963], 339). But the inclination to rationalize this account results in a sidestepping of its theological import. So Cogan: “The locations and the means by which YHWH sustained Elijah ... accent the miraculous aspect of his gracious care of his servant” (*1 Kings*, 432).

⁵³ Thomas B. Dozeman comments: “The last thing Yahweh rained down from heaven was hailstones, which destroyed the land of Egypt (9:23),” and that “the change in setting signals a transition in the character of Yahweh from the warrior in the land of Egypt to the shepherd in the wilderness, who feeds his people.” Moreover, “the bread of heaven is not simply a banquet. Yahweh states that the bread will provide a test to determine whether the Israelites will follow divine law ... the test requires that the people ration food on the Sabbath, even though their circumstance does not require it. Rationing food in the midst of abundance requires that the Israelite people not take the food for granted, but recognize it as a gift from God” (*Commentary on Exodus* [ECC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009], 382-83). So also Brueggemann, “The Book of Exodus,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible* (12 vols.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 1:813.

morning (Exod 16:14).⁵⁴ When they see this mysterious “stuff,” the Israelites ask one another, “What is it (מַן הַזֶּה)?” Moses explains that “it is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat” (Exod 16:15). The inadvertent naming of the substance points to its mysterious quality. As Brueggemann observes, “[the] name ... has no positive content. It is only a question, one that indicates that this is strange, unfamiliar bread without antecedents or parallels. The positive identification of the bread is in Moses’ explanation: It is bread given by Yahweh to eat.”⁵⁵

Attempts to naturalize the presence of manna in the wilderness are not uncommon. To note but one example: William H. C. Propp argues that the mythical aspects of the tradition take root in natural phenomena:

Like the Torah’s other tales of desert sustenance, the legends of quail and Manna arise from natural phenomenon. In the spring, quails migrating over the Sinai fall exhausted to the ground, becoming easy prey. The miraculous in 16:15 thus lies, not in the phenomenon itself, but in its timeliness and magnitude. Similarly, despite some glowing differences ..., there can be no doubt that Manna is a mythologization of “honey-dew,” the sweet pellets ... secreted by plant lice.⁵⁶

But while the idea of manna may well have emerged from a communal memory of a natural phenomenon, this is not how it is interpreted by the author (or editor) of the Exodus

⁵⁴ While the quails are in no way responsible for *bringing* manna to the Israelites, it is at least worth mentioning that this account, like those above, also involves birds.

⁵⁵ Ibid. In the course of their gathering (and disobeying the instructions on *how* they are to gather it), they discover that collected but unused manna spoils overnight (Exod 16:20), that uncollected manna melts in the heat of the afternoon (Exod 16:21), that a surplus gathered on the Sabbath eve does not spoil but is preserved (Exod 16:24), and that manna does not fall on the Sabbath (Exod 16:27). The account closes with the command that a portion of manna be set aside, which will never spoil and will remind the people of how they were fed in the wilderness (Exod 16:32-34). Subsequent references to the manna tradition include Num 11:6-9; 25:5; Deut 8:3; Pss 78:23-25; 105:40; Neh 9:15. The tradition also appears in Pseudo-Philo’s *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*, where Moses is shown the heavenly storehouses in which manna is kept (19.10).

⁵⁶ Propp, *Exodus 1-18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 2; New York: Doubleday, 1999), 600.

account, for whom it is “bread from heaven (לחם מן השמים)” (Exod 16:4). The matter is stated more forcefully in the Psalms, where it is called “the grain of heaven (דגן שמים)” (Ps 78:24), “the bread of angels (לחם אבירים; lit., “bread of mighty ones”)” (Ps 78:25), and “heavenly bread (לחם שמים)” (Ps 105:40).⁵⁷

In all of these stories the persons fed miraculously are set apart and favored by their respective deities. The she-wolf and the woodpecker who nurture Romulus and Remus are instruments of supernatural provision, their acts of care demonstrating the exceptional nature of the infants they serve. Similarly, Elijah’s preservation at the wadi and later at Zarephath shows that YHWH looks over him personally. Finally, the manna given to the Israelites, understood on the one hand as a test of their adherence to God’s instructions, manifests God’s covenant fidelity and steadfastness to the people who were brought out of Egypt.

The reader sees Mary’s feeding as signifying that she is both chosen and unique, a point that the author stresses elsewhere by means of her matchless purity. But what

⁵⁷ “Heavenly bread” is my translation. Cf. the NRSV’s “food from heaven,” which more closely mirrors the language of Exod 16. The absence of the מן in Ps 105:40 implies that manna is not simply food *from* heaven; it is itself “heavenly food.” This reading is supported by the LXX’s rendering of לחם שמים as ἄρτον οὐρανοῦ, “bread of heaven,” or “heaven’s own bread” (LXX Ps 104:40). The notion that manna is heavenly or angelic fare is present in the NT. Paul refers to it in his typological exegesis of the Exodus narrative in 1 Corinthians as “spiritual food (πνευματικὸν βρῶμα)” (10:3) (so Bruce J. Malina *The Palestinian Manna Tradition: The Manna Tradition in the Palestinian Targums and Its Relationship to the New Testament Writings* [AGSU 7; Leiden: Brill, 1968], 99; Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* [Hermeneia; trans. James W. Leitch; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1975], 165; Ulrich Luz, *Das Geschichtsverständnis des Paulus* (BET 49; Munich: Kaiser, 1968), 117-23. Manna is interpreted christologically in the Gospel of John, where Jesus identifies himself with the bread that has come down from heaven (6:30-33). So Malina: this is “a Christian midrash on the manna tradition, a meditation on this tradition in the light of Jesus, an explanation of the true meaning of this tradition in terms of Jesus, an up-dating of this tradition called forth by the fact that the Word became flesh” (*Manna*, 106). Additional NT references to the manna tradition are Heb 9:4 and Rev 2:17.

distinguishes her when she arrives in the temple is not her purity; it is the priest's claim that she is destined to play a role in salvation history: "The Lord God has magnified your name in all generations. In the last days, the Lord will manifest redemption to the sons of Israel because of you" (PJ 7:8). And in this regard, Mary serves as a type of Elijah figure, signaling God's imminent judgment and redemption of Israel (e.g., Mal 4:5, and later, Luke 1:17). Her heavenly diet is therefore less about evidencing her purity and more about preserving it toward a specific goal: the incarnation of the *λόγος* through the birth of Jesus, when God's redemption begins to take shape.⁵⁸

3.4.2. Dancing in the HB/LXX and Early Christian Literature

Mary's miraculous feeding is preceded by another striking image: her dancing on the third step of the altar. The Israelites dance twice in the Exodus narrative: after they evade the Egyptian army through the sea and after they forge a golden calf at the base of Sinai. Both amount to worship of the deity, but only one is properly directed. In 2 Samuel, moreover, David dances as he and the Israelites transport the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem. His wife interprets his behavior as indecent, but he seems to understand it as an act of pious humility before God. While the NT contains a few scattered and largely unrelated references to dancing, the relative silence of early Christian authors on the topic is not absolute. The second-century *Acts of John* includes the Hymn of the Dance, an antiphonal performance that is accompanied by dancing.

⁵⁸ Addressed more fully in Chapter Five, below.

3.4.2.1. Miriam, the Golden Calf, and Victory Songs

The “Song of the Sea” of Exod 15:1-18 is one of the oldest sections of poetry in the HB. In it, Moses and the Israelites give thanks for YHWH’s defeat of the Egyptians.⁵⁹ This lengthy hymn is followed by a shorter one led by Moses and Aaron’s sister: “Then the prophet (נביאה) Miriam ... took a tambourine (תוף/τύμπανον) in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing (ובמחלות בתפילים/τυμπάνων καὶ χορῶν). And Miriam sang to them: ‘Sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea’ ” (Exod 15:20-21). Regarding content, Miriam’s song is similar to the Song of the Sea: both celebrate the miraculous overthrow of the Egyptian army, and both credit YHWH with the triumph. It is distinct in that she sings alone and is accompanied by women playing instruments and dancing.

The combination of these peculiar elements, according to Eunice Blanchard Poethig, evidences a discrete Israelite musical tradition, the Victory Song, which is manifested when women greet soldiers who are returning from battle.⁶⁰ In Judges, for example, when Jephthah arrives home after conquering the Ammonites, his daughter welcomes him “with

⁵⁹ Standard treatments of the hymn’s date include Frank Moore Cross, “The Song of the Sea and Canaanite Myth,” in idem, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 121-25; David Noel Freedman, “The Song of the Sea,” in *Pottery, Poetry, and Prophecy: Studies in Early Hebrew Poetry* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1980), 179-86. Also J. Gerald Janzen: the song also celebrates YHWH’s power over the sea *itself*, which is often conceived of as “the symbolic embodiment of forces of chaos and disruption that threaten the realm of the gods and the world as the gods have ordered it” (*Exodus* [WEST; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997], 107).

⁶⁰ Poethig, “The Victory Song Tradition of the Women of Israel” (PhD diss., Union Theological Seminary, 1985), 27-28. She is anticipated by Hermann Gunkel, “Fundamental Problems of Hebrew Literary History,” in *What Remains of the Old Testament and Other Essays* (trans. H. K. Dallas; London: George Allan & Unwin Ltd., 1928), 59, 61; Georg Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (trans. David E. Green; Nashville: Abingdon, 1968), 275.

timbrels (תפֿים/τυμπάνοις) and with dancing (לשור והמחלות/χοροῖς)” (11:34). Similarly, after David defeats the Philistine Goliath, women (“female dancers” or “females dancing [χορεύουσai]” in the LXX) come out “singing and dancing (לשור והמחלות)” to meet him “with tambourines (תפֿים/τυμπάνοις), with songs of joy, and with musical instruments” (1 Sam 18:6).⁶¹ Poethig concludes that this tradition is “associated with women as performers and with the celebration of victory as the content of the songs and the context for performance” and “a vehicle by which the people of Israel, led by the women, could restructure their understanding of life.”⁶²

⁶¹ Comparable language is found in Psa 149:3 (“Let them praise his name with dancing [לְחֹל/χορῶ], making melody to him with tambourine [תִּתִּי/τυμπάνῳ] and lyre”); Psa 150:4 (“Praise him with tambourine and dance [לְחֹל וּמְחֹלָה/τυμπάνῳ καὶ χορῶ]”).

⁶² Poethig, “Victory Song Tradition,” 66, 116. Because these songs are necessarily led by women, it is unusual that Miriam’s song would *follow* the more prominent Song of the Sea. James Watts considers the ordering deliberate, if unusual: “Exodus 15 modifies the tradition for thematic purposes, to highlight in its narrative frame the psalm’s central point, that YHWH alone is to be credited and praised.” That is, “the Song of the Sea plays the role of a victory song transformed by the recognition that ‘YHWH (alone) is a warrior’” (“Song and the Ancient Reader,” *PRSt* 22 [1995]: 143). Noting the repetition of Exod 14:28-29 in 15:19, Phyllis Tribble concludes that the present form of the text likely results from editorial “tampering,” and that Miriam’s song would have likely preceded Moses’ in the original sequence: “The two endings work in tension, not in tandem. The Mosaic conclusion so overpowers the Miriamic as to raise the question of why the latter ever survived” (“Bringing Miriam out of the Shadows,” in *A Feminist Companion to Exodus to Deuteronomy* [FCB6; ed. Athalya Brenner; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994], 170-72; original publication in *BibRev* 5 [1989]: 170-90). So also Martin Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary* (OTL; trans. J. S. Bowden; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 121-26; Frank Crüsemann, *Studien zur Formgeschichte von Hymnus und Danklied in Israel* (WMANT 32; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1969), 19-38; Rita J. Burns, *Has the Lord Indeed Spoken only through Moses? A Study of the Biblical Portrait of Miriam* (SBLDS 84; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 12-16; Walter Houston, “Exodus,” in *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (eds. John Barton and John Muddiman; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 77. Janzen interprets the redundancy as a narrative analepsis, “the temporary withholding of vital information in favor of its belated introduction later for one effect or another.” The effect of this literary device is to “throw us back behind the hymn to position us once more at 14:29,” so that “the song of Moses and the people of Israel ... comes in response to the song of Miriam and the other women” In sum, “The Song of the Sea is the Song of Miriam, and its performance ... comes as Moses and his fellow Israelites ‘second’ her hymnic initiative” (“Song of Moses, Song of Miriam: Who is Seconding Whom?” *CBQ* 54 [1992]: 214-16).

The dancing that coincides with Miriam's song is more than an energized expression of thanksgiving; it is an act of cultic worship. This is most clearly seen retrospectively in light of the golden calf episode in Exod 32. After they have arrived at Sinai, the people command Aaron, "Come, make gods for us, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him" (Exod 32:1). He fashions a golden calf from their jewelry, and they receive it readily. He builds an altar for the calf and demands that the next day be "a festival to the LORD (חג ליהוה)" (Exod 32:5). The people comply by making sacrifices and burnt offerings, by eating and drinking, and by rising up "to revel (קצץ/παίζειν)" (Exod 32:6).⁶³ As Moses descends the mountain, he sees "the calf and the dancing (מחלל/χορούς)" and becomes angry (Exod 32:19). Rita J. Burns observes that "the cultic context [of this scene] is unmistakable," and that "the celebration before the calf ..., like the one which Miriam led, commemorated Yahweh's victory over the Egyptians."⁶⁴

In both cases the Israelites dance in worship of the God who has delivered them and who now dwells among them. The spectacle at Sinai incurs the wrath of YHWH and Moses, but not because the people are worshiping another deity. As John I. Durham notes, the sin of the golden calf is better understood as the desire to possess God: "The calf represented

⁶³ Dozemann on the semantic range of קצץ: "The word means 'laugh' in the birth story of Isaac, forming the basis of his name ... Abraham (Gen 17:17) and Sarah (Gen 18:12, 15; 21:6) laugh when told that they would have a child in their old age. A related word, *śāḥaq*, indicates sport and dancing, prompting some to translate, 'they rose to dance/sport.' The meanings 'laughter' and 'dance' underscore the noise of the festival, a prominent motif from ancient Near Eastern mythology often prompting divine anger [e.g., *Atra-Hasis* A.II.i.2-8]" (*Exodus*, 704). The LXX's rendering of קצץ with the somewhat ambiguous παίζειν (lit., "to play," perhaps as a child [παῖς] would) testifies to the range of activities it may imply.

⁶⁴ Burns, *Miriam*, 19-20.

Yahweh on *their* terms. Yahweh had made clear repeatedly that he would be received and worshiped only on *his* terms.”⁶⁵ The problem is therefore less with the *form* of their worship—of which dancing is a component—and more with their (mis)representation of the deity.

3.4.2.2. David and the Ark of God

One of the most memorable dancing-related scenes in the HB/LXX occurs when David resolves to bring the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem, the newly founded capital city (2 Sam 5:6-16).⁶⁶ His first attempt to do so is narrated at the start of 2 Sam 6, when he and thirty thousand men bring the vessel from the house of Abinadab in Baale-Judah (6:1-3). After placing it on a cart driven by Uzzah and Ahio, Abinadab’s sons, the procession begins: “David and all the house of Israel were dancing (משחקים/παίζοντες) before the LORD with all their might, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines (תפים/τυμπάνοις) and castanets and cymbals” (2 Sam 6:5). The language of this account, the combination of dancing and instrumentation in particular, echoes the Victory Song tradition outlined above. But the dancing itself (רקח/παίζειν) more closely resembles the Israelites’ reveling (רקח/παίζειν) in worship of the golden calf (Exod 32:6). And like the golden calf episode, the first attempt at transporting the ark ends disastrously, and possibly for similar reasons.

⁶⁵ Durham, *Exodus*, 422. Similarly Pier Cesare Bori: “The people, through Aaron, do not give themselves other gods, but make for themselves an image of the Mosaic God, the God of the exodus” (*The Golden Calf and the Origins of the Anti-Jewish Controversy* [SFSHJ 16; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990], 9).

⁶⁶ Repeated with variations in 1 Chr 13-16.

As the Israelites process, “Uzzah reached out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen shook it. The anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God struck him there because he reached out his hand to the ark; and he died there beside the ark of God” (2 Sam 6:6-7). According to the Chronicler, his death results from the Israelites’ failure to carry the ark properly (i.e., *not* on an ox cart) (1 Chr 15:13).⁶⁷ But A. Graeme Auld wonders if Uzzah’s reaching out for the sacred box was truly an attempt to steady it: “How powerful or how violent was [his] ‘grasp’? Was it simply by touching the ark and seeking to aid its passage that he was found at fault, or did he pay the price for a hold that sought to control it?”⁶⁸

Auld’s question is intriguing, especially in light of the golden calf episode: just as the people at Sinai are punished for their attempt to possess the deity via an iconic representation, perhaps Uzzah is penalized for attempting to possess the same deity (albeit in a more literalistic fashion). The same could be said for the very means by which the Israelites transport the ark: whether consciously or unconsciously, by deviating from the statutes given to them, they betray their desire to receive YHWH on their terms. And in this regard, the dancing that accompanies this first procession, like that which occurs around the golden calf at Sinai, is misdirected.

⁶⁷ Josephus asserts that Uzzah is punished for touching the ark without being a priest (*Ant.* 7.81). Christopher T. Begg, on Josephus’s interpretation: “This reference to Uzzah’s ‘not being a priest’ and so not entitled to ‘touch’ the ark picks up 7.80 where Josephus records that ‘the priests’ who themselves carried the ark out of Aminadab’s house and placed it on the wagon ‘permitted’ the latter’s ‘brothers and sons’ to ‘draw’ the wagon with the help of oxen” (“David’s Transfer of the Ark according to Josephus,” *BBR* 7 [1997]: 19).

⁶⁸ Auld, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 412.

After he witnesses the lethal power of the ark, David leaves it in the protection of Obed-edom the Gittite (2 Sam 6:9-10).⁶⁹ After three months (2 Sam 6:9:11), a second attempt to move it is made, only this time it is carried by people and preceded by sacrificial offerings: “David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing (בשמחה/εὐφροσύνη); and when those who bore the ark of the LORD had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fatling” (2 Sam 6:12-13).⁷⁰ In contrast to the previous account, where all those gathered dance before the ark as it processes, now the king does so alone: “David danced (מכרך/but cf. LXX ἀνακρούετο) before the LORD with all his might; David was girded with a linen ephod” (2 Sam 6:14). As they enter the city, Saul’s daughter (and David’s wife) Michal witnesses the scene: “[She] looked out of the window, and saw King David leaping (מפוז/ὀρχούμενον) and dancing (מכרך/but cf. LXX ἀνακρούμενον) before the LORD” (2 Sam 6:16).⁷¹ She later rebukes him for his flamboyance: “How the king of Israel honored himself today, uncovering himself today before the eyes of his servants’ maids, as any vulgar fellow (LXX: one of the revealed [i.e., naked] dancers [ἀποκαλυφθεῖς εἰς τῶν ὀρχουμένων]) might shamelessly uncover himself!” (2 Sam 6:20).⁷²

⁶⁹ Gerardo G. Sachs posits that the ark’s capacity to destroy (e.g., Lev 10:1-2, 1 Sam 5:1-12) is what prompted David to carry it on a cart in the first place (“David Dances -- Michal Scoffs,” *JBQ* 34 [2006]: 261).

⁷⁰ The scene likely presupposes 1 Chr 15:26: “And because God helped the Levites who were carrying the ark of the covenant of the LORD, they sacrificed seven bulls and seven rams.” So A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel* (WBC 11; Waco: Word, 1989), 105.

⁷¹ David’s dancing (כרך) in 2 Sam 6:14, 16 is rendered by LXX translators ἀνακρούειν, which typically involves the playing of stringed instruments, not dancing alone (so also Judg 5:11; 1 Chr 25:3). Cf. David P. Wright: Michal’s criticism of David “suggest[s] that כרך is some sort of dancing, since playing an instrument does not seem likely to lead to the results that disgust Michal” (“Music and Dance in 2 Samuel 6,” *JBL* 121 [2002]: 219).

⁷² “The ephod,” according to Alter, “was probably a short garment tied around the hips or waist, and so David whirling and leaping might easily have exposed himself” (*The David Story: A*

David's response indicates that his deportment, while certainly undignified, should be seen as an act of humility: "It was before the LORD, who chose me in place of your father and all his household, to appoint me as prince over Israel, the people of the LORD, that I have danced (יִשְׁחַקְתִּי/ but cf. LXX παίζομαι καὶ ὀρχήσομαι) before the LORD. I will make myself yet more contemptible than this, and I will be abased in my own eyes; but by the maids of whom you have spoken, by them I shall be held in high honor" (2 Sam 6:21-22). As Gwilym H. Jones argues, "David's vow to make himself 'more contemptible than this' has a veiled reference to his piety."⁷³

3.4.2.3. Dancing in Early Christian Literature

Considering the number of points at which persons dance in celebration and worship in the HB/LXX, the sparseness of comparable activity in early Christian literature is surprising.⁷⁴ Paul's allusion to the golden calf episode in 1 Cor 10:7 is the only instance in

Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel [New York: Norton, 1999], 227). Further discussion of this garment in A. Phillips, "David's Linen Ephod," *VT* 19 (1969): 485-87; N. L. Tidwell, "The Linen Ephod: 1 Sam. 2:18 and 2 Sam 6:14," *VT* 24 (1974): 505-7. Also Ellen White, in defense of Michal: "According to Israelite law and practice, Michal's critique of David's behavior was correct. As his wife, Michal is understandably upset at his wanton display" ("Michal the Misinterpreted," *JSOT* 31 [2007]: 460).

⁷³ Jones, "1 and 2 Samuel," in *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (eds. John Barton and John Muddiman; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 218. Bruce Rosenstock sees in David's performance a critique of "sexually charged fertility rituals that involved phallic display." That is, "David's self-revelation is precisely counterpoised with YHWH's self-concealment. David refuses the role of earthly embodiment of YHWH's glory. His glory is his lowliness in the eyes of others that makes possible his intimacy with YHWH" ("David's Play: Fertility Rituals and the Glory of God in 2 Samuel 6," *JSOT* 31 [2006]: 75).

⁷⁴ The attitude of NT authors toward dance is more apathetic than hostile, and this distinguishes them from much Patristic literature, which, according to J. G. Davies, is characterized by "a constant rejection of dancing in any form, whether as a secular pastime or a liturgical devotion" (*Liturgical Dance: An Historical, Theological and Practical Handbook* [London: SCM, 1984], 19). Survey of relevant sources in *ibid.*, 19-28.

the NT where dancing is equated with worship: “Do not become idolaters (εἰδωλολάτραι) as some of them did; as it is written, ‘The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play (παίζειν)’ ” (10:7). It is a festive activity in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:25), while in Matthew and Mark Herod’s daughter uses it as a manipulative ploy that culminates in the beheading of John the Baptist (Matt 14:1-12; Mark 6:17-21).⁷⁵

It plays a more significant role in Matthew and Luke, when Jesus criticizes the people’s stubbornness by way of an analogy: “To what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another, ‘We played the flute (ὑψήσαμεν) for you, and you did not dance (ὠρχήσασθε); we wailed (ἐθρήνησαμεν), and you did not mourn (ἐκόψασθε)’ ” (Matt 11:16-17; also Luke 7:31-32).⁷⁶ While the analogy certainly employs dancing imagery, dancing itself is by no means the focus. The interpretation that follows (in Matt 11:18-19; Luke 7:33-34) shows that Jesus is speaking of the people’s failure to receive him and John the Baptist.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ In Mark the dancer is named Herodias (6:22), while Matthew refers to her as the daughter of Herodias, Herod’s wife (14:6). Cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 18.5.4 [136-137], where Herod’s daughter is named Salome.

⁷⁶ Luke’s version is only slightly different: “They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another (προσφωνοῦσιν ἀλλήλοις), ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not weep (ἐκλάυσατε)’ ” (7:32).

⁷⁷ So Luz: “The interpretation in vv. 18–19 is clearer than the parable itself. The twofold ἦλθεν (‘came’) connects John the Baptist and Jesus with each other. Both are rejected and suffer the same fate. The double criticism conveys the impression of Israel’s hardness” (*Matthew 8-20: A Commentary on Matthew 8-20* [Hermeneia; trans. James E. Crouch; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001], 149). Also Johnson: “In Luke’s version, the whole point is that whatever is done by one group displeases the other. Thus, no matter what the style of the prophets John and Jesus, there will be cause for complaint” (*Luke*, 123). Cf. Bovon: “The ‘we’ develops two complementary reproaches. They have ‘played the flute,’ that is, invited them to a dance, to a party ... And the children invited to play have not responded to this call. ‘We’ then have summoned ‘you’ to a show of lament, and ‘you’ have also turned this down” (*Luke 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1-9:50* [Hermeneia; trans. Christine M. Thomas; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002], 286).

The idea that dance is a legitimate and even appropriate form of worship is not entirely foreign to early Christian authors. In the Hymn of the Dance in the second-century *Acts of John* (94-96), Jesus and his disciples dance together on the night that he is arrested.⁷⁸ It is preceded by his summoning the disciples: “Before I am handed over (παραδοθῆναι) to them, let us hymn (ὕμνήσωμεν) the father and thereby go out (ἐξέλθωμεν) to what lies ahead” (94.3-4).⁷⁹ They join hands, forming a ring (94.4-6), and sing in antiphonal format: “[Jesus] began to sing a hymn and to say, ‘Glory to you, father.’ Circling around him, we answered, ‘Amen.’ ‘Glory to you, word (λόγε); glory to you, grace (χάρις).’ ‘Amen.’ ‘Glory to you, holy one (ἅγιε); glory to your glory (δόξα σου τῇ δόξῃ).’ ‘Amen.’ ‘We praise you father; we give thanks to you, light, in whom darkness does not live.’ ‘Amen.’ ” (94.7-17).

In the midst of their chanting is an interjection that Barbara E. Bowe dubs “perplexing” and “interruptive”: “Grace is dancing (Ἡ χάρις χορεύει)” (95.18).⁸⁰ The reference draws from the analogy in Matt 11:16-17 and Luke 7:31-32, where the people are criticized for their failure to “dance.” But in the Hymn of the Dance, the situation is different. As the antiphonal resumes, Jesus says, “ ‘I wish to play the flute (αὐλῆσαι); everyone dance (ὀρχήσασθε).’ ‘Amen.’ ‘I wish to wail (θρηνῆσαι); everyone, mourn (κόψασθε).’ ‘Amen.’ ... ‘The twelfth number is dancing (χορεύει) above.’ ‘Amen.’ ‘To the all (ὅλῳ), he is beginning to

⁷⁸ Critical edition: Éric Junod and Jean-Daniel Kaestli, eds., *Acta Iohannis* (CChrSA 1&2; 2 vols.; Turnhout: Brepols, 1983). The Hymn is probably not original to the *Acts of John*. Junod and Kaestli see it is part of a larger “gnostic” interpolation (chs. 94-102, 109) penned in the second century and incorporated in the third (ibid., 2:581-632). Portions of the hymn seem to have circulated independently; Augustine, for example, quotes ten lines of it in his *Ep.* 237 to Ceretius.

⁷⁹ This introduction may serve to situate the hymn within the canonical passion narratives, specifically Matthew and Mark, where Jesus and the disciples, “when they had sung the hymn (ὕμνήσαντες), ... went out (ἐξῆλθον) to the Mount of Olives” (Matt 26:30; Mark 14:26).

⁸⁰ Bowe, “Dancing into the Divine: The Hymn of the Dance in the *Acts of John*,” *J ECS* 7 (1999): 95.

dance (χορεύειν) upward.’ ‘Amen.’ ‘The one who does not dance (Ὁ μὴ χορεύων) does not know what is happening.’ ‘Amen.’ ” (95.19-30).

At a break in the antiphonal pattern, Jesus links the dance with his crucifixion: “Having followed me in the dance (χορεία), see yourself in me who is speaking, and having seen what I am doing, keep quiet about the mysteries. O dancer (χορεύων), understand what I am doing, for this human suffering that I am about to suffer is yours. For you would not be able to understand fully what you suffer if I had not been sent to you by the father as word (λόγος)” (96.1-6). After the hymn’s end in 96.28 the narrative resumes: “Thus, beloved ones, having danced (χορεύσας) with us, the Lord went out” (97.1).

Much about the Hymn remains mysterious, but Junod and Kaestli suggest that it reflects the liturgical practices of the author’s community.⁸¹ While Bowe admits that evidence for such practice in early Christianity is dubious at best, she understands the hymn as providing “a unique expression of communion as it may have been understood by the community of AJ,” and as “a celebration of the union between the Lord as revealer, the Godhead, and those who dance their way into this mysterious divine presence.” Moreover, “in form and content [it] celebrates the saving and transforming union between the Lord and the community that acclaims him.”⁸²

⁸¹ Junod and Kaestli, *Acta Iohannis*, 644-45. Cf. Pieter J. Lalleman, who argues that it is “a literary creation” (*The Acts of John: A Two-Stage Initiation into Johannine Gnosticism* [SAAA 4; Louvain: Peeters, 1998], 64.

⁸² Bowe, “Dancing into the Divine,” 100-2.

3.4.3. Dancing and the Gods

Drawing from several of the sources cited above, Stephen Benko defines dance as “an expression of joy ... that was part of Near Eastern religious service up to the time of Christianity.” Mary’s dancing, in his view, may imply “that [she] was filled with the spirit of joy in the presence of God,” but it may also betray the author’s familiarity with pagan religious practice: “The female followers of Dionysus ..., when they felt themselves filled by the god, broke out in uncontrollable dancing ... Worshipers of Cybele, the Great Mother, were famous for their singing, dancing, and the use of musical instruments.” Benko concludes that the dancing imagery contributes to what he sees as PJ’s chief goal: “to elevate Mary to the level of the great virgin-mother goddesses of the Greco-Roman world.”⁸³ This thesis is problematic on at least two levels. First, that the author distinguishes Mary from the God who showers her with grace (PJ 7:9) makes it unlikely that he or she wishes to raise her to a divine status. Second, while dancing gods and goddesses are indeed prevalent in ancient literature, it is equally common, if not more so, for their *devotees* to dance ecstatically in worship.

3.4.3.1. Pedagogy and Worship

Dancing as an expression of worship features prominently in the plays of Euripides (ca. 480-406 B.C.E.), where it is frequently associated with the worship of Dionysus, the god of wine and ecstasy.⁸⁴ In the *Cyclops*, for example, a certain Silenus is given a taste of wine

⁸³ Benko, *Virgin Goddess*, 200-202.

⁸⁴ Ancient authors who speak of ritual dance typically do so in the context of stage

by Odysseus and exclaims, “Oo la la (βαβαί)! Bacchus invites (παρακαλεῖ) me to the dance (χορεύσαι)!” (157 [Kovacs, LCL]). At the start of the *Bacchae*, Dionysus himself exclaims that he has come to Greece “having set everything in Asia a-dancing (χορεύσας) and having established my rites (καταστήσας) so that my divinity may be made manifest to mortals” (*Bacch.* 21-22 [Kovacs, LCL]). The elderly Cadmus later questions Teiresias concerning how to honor the deity: “Where shall our dance steps take us (ποῖ δεῖ χορεύειν), where shall we set our feet and shake our aged heads? ... I will not grow weary day or night of beating the ground with my bacchic wand. How delightful it is that we forget our age!” (*Bacch.* 184-188 [Kovacs, LCL]). Teiresias responds: “I too am young and ready to try dancing (χοροῖς)” (*Bacch.* 190 [Kovacs, LCL]). He then asks, “Will someone say that in preparing to dance (χορεύειν) with my head crowned with ivy I show no respect for my old age? No, for the god has not distinguished old from young where dancing (χορεύειν) is concerned: he wants to receive joint honor from everyone and to be magnified (αὔξουσθαι) by all without exception” (*Bacch.* 204-209 [Kovacs, LCL]).⁸⁵

Plato’s *Laws*, in Steven H. Lonsdale’s view, is “perhaps the most valuable and underused ancient written source for dance.”⁸⁶ In this work, Plato (ca. 423-347 B.C.E.)

performances, and such dances pale in comparison to those they imitate. So Lonsdale: “Unlike ritual, which is embedded into daily life, ‘ritual dancing’ on the stage is not integral to the dramatic action. Thus whenever a chorus acts as a dancing body it does so in an artificially created ritual context and must invoke words such as *chorus* ... and various hymnic genres that evoke the ritual setting.” The same could be said for any written account of ancient dance: “because it is by definition a sensual and visual art, verbal sources will never succeed in describing it fully” (*Dance and Ritual Play in Greek Religion* [ASH; Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993] 7).

⁸⁵ Other examples in *Bacch.* 114; 195; 321-324; 567; *Tro.* 325-334.

⁸⁶ And while it is admittedly a philosophical rather than a “historical” source it offers “a useful way of who to look at the function of dance as a collective act of worship and play in a community in its widest social and religious contexts” (Lonsdale, *Dance and Ritual*, 8-9).

considers the ability to dance and sing to be a sign of a well-educated person. A dialogue near the beginning conveys the point: “[Athenian]: Shall we assume that the uneducated man (ἀπαίδευτος) is without choir-training (ἀχόρευτος), and the educated man (πεπαιδευμένον) fully choir-trained (κεχορευκότα)? [Clinias]: Certainly. [Athenian]: Choir-training (χορεία), as a whole, embraces of course dancing (ὄρχησις) and song. [Clinias]: Undoubtedly. [Athenian]: So the well-educated man will be able both to sing (ᾄδειν) and dance (ὀρχεῖσθαι) well. [Clinias]: Evidently” (*Leg.* 654b [Bury, LCL]). “In Plato’s scheme,” Lonsdale observes, “music and dance were the first and fundamental steps of education ... The overall goal of education, to like and dislike the right things, was achieved through the agency of pain and pleasure ... dance and music were of special utility to the lawmaker, since they were pleasurable activities.”⁸⁷

But dancing has more than a rudimentary pedagogical purpose. Plato claims that it is rooted in comparable *divine* activity: “To us men the very gods, who were given ... to be our fellows in the dance (συγχορευτάς), have granted the pleasurable perception of rhythm and harmony, whereby they cause us to move and lead our choirs (χορηγεῖν), linking (ξυνείροντας) us one with another by means of songs and dances (ὀρχήσεσιν)” (*Leg.* 653e-654a [Bury, LCL]). In short, dancing constitutes a human imitation of the divine and the means by which the two interpenetrate one another.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 24. Also Plato, *Leg.* 654d: “If, then, we ... understand what constitutes goodness in respect of dance (ὀρχήσεως) and song (ὥδῆς), we also know who is and who is not rightly educated; but without this knowledge we shall never be able to discern whether there exists any safeguard for education or where it is to be found” (Bury, LCL).

3.4.3.2. The Muses and Charites

In Greek and Roman mythology, the Muses (Μοῦσαι/*Musae*) and the Charites (Χάριτες/*Gratiae*; lit., Graces) propagate the art of dance among humankind.⁸⁸ Hesiod (seventh-eighth cent. B.C.E.) initiates his *Theogony* with a paean to the former that includes a description of their dwelling place and their activities there: “Let us begin to sing from the Heliconian Muses (Μουσάων), who possess the great and holy mountain of Helicon and dance (ὀρχεῦνται) on their soft feet around the violet-dark fountain and the altar of Cronus’s mighty son ... they perform choral dances (χορούς) on highest Helicon, beautiful, lovely ones, and move nimbly with their feet” (*Theog.* 1-8 [Most, LCL]).⁸⁹ Their position at the start of the *Theogony*, according to Lonsdale, “suggests their primacy as animators and arrangers of the cosmic order. They are the source of all creative inspiration for recreating the divine and heroic past through songs and dances.”⁹⁰

Mary’s dancing echoes the Hesiodan goddesses in at least two ways. First, in what would otherwise seem a tautology, Mary’s dancing “on her feet (τοῖς ποσὶν αὐτῆς),” resembles the Muses’ dancing “on their soft feet (πόσσ’ ἀπαλοῖσιν)” and moving “nimbly with their feet

⁸⁸ So Euripides, *Herc.* 685-686: “Never shall I check (καταπαύσομεν) the Muses who have made me dance (Μούσας αἱ μ’ ἐχόρευσαν)!” (Kovacs, LCL). Similarly Plato: “[Athenian]: Shall we ... postulate that education owes its origin to Apollo and the Muses? [Clinias]: Yes” (*Leg.* 654a [Bury, LCL]); also *Leg.* 795e: “Of dancing (ὀρχήσεως) there is one branch in which the style of the Muse (Μούσης) is imitated ... and another which aims at physical soundness” (Bury, LCL).

⁸⁹ So also Hesiod, *Works and Days* 1-2: “Muses (Μοῦσαι), from Pieria, glorifying in songs (ἀοιδῇσι), tell in hymns of your father Zeus” (Most, LCL). Similarly at the start of the Pseudo-Homeric *Batrachomyomachia*: “As I begin on my first column, I pray for the chorus from Helicon (χορὸν ἐξ Ἑλικῶνος) to come into my heart for the song (ἀοιδῆς) that I have just set down in tablets on my knees” (*Batr.* 1-3 [West, LCL]). Hesiod identifies them as daughters of Zeus (*Theog.* 25, 36, 52, etc.). So also Homer, *Il.* 2.597; *Od.* 8.487-488; Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibl.* 1.13; Pausanias, *Descr.* 1.2.5; Cicero, *Nat. d.* 3.21.

⁹⁰ Lonsdale, *Dance and Ritual*, 48.

(ἐπερρώσαντο δὲ ποσσίν).⁹¹ Second, and more significantly, their respective dances are both performed in proximity to an altar: the Muses dance *around* (περί) the altar (βωμός) of Zeus, and the Virgin dances *on* (ἐπί) the altar (ἱεραστήριον) of the Jerusalem temple.⁹² The presence of an altar on Helicon sets up the mountain as a quasi-temple where the Muses, though divine, serve and even worship Zeus. Both they and Mary are cast as devotees of a higher being.

The Muses are most commonly associated not with dancing but with the inspiration of poetic verse, especially that which is sung. But as Penelope Murray and Peter Wilson note, poetry and song are inextricably linked with dance in the Greek understanding of μουσική (named after the Muses themselves), which constitutes “a seamless complex of instrumental music, poetic word, and coordinated physical movement.”⁹³ Thus the act of dancing may be understood even when it is not mentioned explicitly. Homer’s (ca. eighth cent. B.C.E.) *Odyssey* commences famously with the invocation, “Tell me, O Muse (μοῖ ἔννεπε, Μοῦσα)” (1.1).⁹⁴ The *Iliad* begins with the similar albeit less explicit, “Sing, goddess

⁹¹ Perhaps because of its perceived redundancy, the phrase is entirely absent from Hock’s translation (*Infancy Gospels*, 45).

⁹² Or at least on its “third step (τρίτου βαθμοῦ)” (PJ 7:9), which may reflect the leveled composition of the altar in Ezek 43:13-17 (so *ibid.*)

⁹³ Murray and Wilson, “Introduction: *Mousikē*, not Music,” in *Music and the Muses: The Culture of ‘Mousikē’ in the Classical Athenian City* (eds. Penelope Murray and Peter Wilson; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1.

⁹⁴ Elsewhere in the *Odyssey* the Muses teach various persons to sing (8.63, 73, 481, 488) and lead a hymn of lament (24.60). So also *HH* 3.518; 4.450; Lucian, *Dial. Mar.* 7.1; *Icar.* 27; *Pisc.* 6; *Sacr.* 5. Also Philostratus (ca. 170-247 C.E.), in a critique of Nero: “[He] ... had been brought to Greece by the call of music and his own exaggerated conviction that even the Muses could not surpass the sweetness of his song” (*Nero* 2). According to Strabo (), “all educated men, and especially the musicians (μουσικοί), are ministers (πρόπολοι) of the Muses” (*Geogr.* 10.3.10).

(ἄειδε θεά)” (1.1).⁹⁵ In the *Homeric Hymn* to Apollo and the Muses (ca. sixth-seventh cent. B.C.E.), the author writes: “From the Muses and far-shooting Apollo men are singers (ᾄδοι) and lyre-players (κιθαρισταί) on earth ... He is fortunate whom the Muses love: the voice flows sweet from his lips” (*HH* 25.2-5 [West, LCL]). And their ultimate significance lies in their ability to bestow their gifts on others.

The Charites are frequently named as coworkers of the Muses, especially in conjunction with dancing and related activities.⁹⁶ Pausanias (second cent. B.C.E.) describes an Elean temple containing statues of the Charites (*Descr.* 6.24.6), and Lucian of Samosata (ca. 125-180 C.E.) implies that sacrifices were made to them (*Lex.* 23).⁹⁷ Pierre Grimal notes that they “lived on Olympus together with the Muses with whom they sometimes sang and

⁹⁵ Later in the *Iliad* the poet refers more precisely to the Muses, possibly equating them with the goddess entreated earlier: “Tell me now, you Muses (ἔσπετε νῦν μοι Μοῦσαι) ... for you are goddesses (θεαί) and are present and know all things” (2.484-285 [Murray and Wyatt, LCL]; so also *Il.* 2.491; 11.218; 14.508; 16.112). Several of the *Homeric Hymns* (4.1; 5.1; 9.1; 14.1; 19.1; 20.1; 32.1; 33.1) begin with similar formulations. So also Virgil (*Ecl.* 4.1): “Sicilian Muses (*Musae*), let us sing a somewhat loftier strain” (Fairclough, LCL).

⁹⁶ So Euripides: “I shall not cease mingling (συγκαταμειγνύς) the Graces and the Muses, a union most sweet. May I never live a muse-less life (ἄμουσίας!)” (*Heracles* 673-676 [Kovacs, LCL]). Elsewhere he remarks, “Go, you august Graces (Χάριτες), go and from the heart of Deo angered for her daughter drive the grief by loud cries, and you, Muses (Μοῦσαι), by dance and song (ὕμνοισι χορῶν)” (*Hel.* 1341-1345 [Kovacs, LCL]). So also Horace, *Odes* 3.20.13-17. Hesiod names them Thalia (Festivity), Aglaea (Splendor), and Euphrosyne (Joy) (*Theog.* 907-911). Names also given in Pseudo-Apollodorus (first century C.E.), *Bibl.* 1.3.1. Cf. Callimachus (ca. 305-240 B.C.E.), who posits that they are four in number (*Epigr.* 52). Noting the accounts of Homer, Hesiod, Onomacritus, Antimachus, and the legendary Pamphos, Pausanias records discrepancies regarding their origins and the worship they receive (*Desc.* 9.35.1).

⁹⁷ So also Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Libr.* 3.15.7. In a fifth-century marble relief from Kos the Charites dance around an altar while Pan and the altar’s dedicant look on (image in F. T. van Straten, “Daikrates’ Dream: A votive relief from Kos, and some other kat’onar dedications,” *BABesch* 51 [1976]: 29, pl. 1).

were numbered among the attendants of Apollo, the god of Music ... [and] are said to have exercised all kinds of influence on imaginative and artistic works.”⁹⁸

As the avatars of beauty and elegance, the Charites are responsible for the physical adornment of gods and humans.⁹⁹ The first literary references to them are in the Homeric epics, where they are attendants of Aphrodite (*Il.* 5.338; *Od.* 8.363.366).¹⁰⁰ In the *Odyssey*, they are givers of beauty (6.18) and inspirers of dance (18.194). Pindar (ca. 522-433 B.C.E.) acclaims them as the source of all good things, including dance: “O Graces (Χάριτες) ..., hear my prayer. For with your help all things pleasant and sweet come about for mortals ... not even the gods arrange choruses (χορούς) or feasts (δᾶιτας) without the august Graces (Χαρίτων); but as stewards of all works in heaven, they have their thrones beside Pythian Apollo of the golden bow and worship the Olympian father’s ever flowing majesty” (*Ol.* 14.4-12 [Race, LCL]).¹⁰¹

The author of the *Homeric Hymn* to Artemis suggests that both the Charites and the Muses derive their inspiration from Artemis, who travels to Delphi “to organize the Muses’ and Graces’ fair dance (Μουσῶν καὶ Χαρίτων καλὸν χορὸν ἀρτυνέουσα) ..., [and] hangs up her bent-back bow and her arrows and goes before, her body beautifully adorned, leading the

⁹⁸ Grimal, *Dictionnaire de la Mythologie grecque et romaine* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1951), 99. Also Lonsdale, *Dance and Ritual Play in Greek Religion*, 59. Like the Muses, the Charites are typically thought to be offspring of Zeus (so Hesiod, *Theog.* 907; Callimachus, *Aetia Frag* 6; Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibl.* 1.13; *Orphic Hymn* 60). Cf. Nonnus (ca. fourth-fifth cent. C.E.): they are children of Hera (*Dionysiaca* 31.103) or Dionysus (*Dionysiaca* 15.87; 48.530).

⁹⁹ Hesiod, *Op.* 69; *HH* 5.58; Apollonius Rhodius, *Argon.* 4.425; Diodorus Siculus, *Libr.* 5.72.5; Philostratus, *Imag.* 1.10. So also Hesiod, *Cat.* 14, 68, 92; *HH* 5.94; Sappho, *Frag.* 53; Alcaeus, *Frag.* 386; Lucian, *Gall.* 13.

¹⁰⁰ Similarly in *HH* 5.61-63. So also *Il.* 14.267, 275; 17.51. Cf. *Il.* 18.382-383, where there is only one Charis. Similarly in Lucian, *Dial. d.* 17.1.

¹⁰¹ So also Pindar, *Ol.* 9.27-28: “I cultivate the choice garden of the Graces (Χαρίτων), for it is they who bestow what is delightful.”

dances (ἐξάρχουσα χορούς)” (*HH* 27.14-18 [West, LCL]).¹⁰² The Muses and the Charites are thus understood not as *originators* but as *conduits* of divine action; the arts they inspire in persons take root in activities that they themselves imitate.

3.4.3.3. Mary as Model

Mary’s dancing in the temple is animated by the grace she receives when she is set on the steps of the altar, and it serves as a means by which the people of Israel see and love God. The sources noted above nuance this final point, and in a sense deconstruct it: if dancing is understood as communion with the divine, and if Mary’s actions are interpreted in light of the Muses and Charites who teach human persons to dance and thereby to worship God, then what is the reader to make of the fact that Mary is the only one in the temple who dances?

One of the chief characteristics of ritual dance (or dance in general, for that matter) is its mimetic component: we learn to dance by watching others and imitating their steps.¹⁰³ And because of this, ritual dance in ancient Near Eastern and Greek religion is most commonly construed as a communal activity.¹⁰⁴ While the Virgin’s dancing indicates to the

¹⁰² Cf. Hesiod (*Theog.* 64-65), in which they are said to reside near the peak of Mount Olympus. So also Euripides, *Bacch.* 414. In the *Homeric Hymn* to Apollo, they join hands and dance (ὀρχήσασθαι) together with various other goddesses (*HH* 3.194-196). Also Horace: “Now Cytherean Venus leads the dancers (*choros*) as the moon hangs overhead, and the lovely Graces (*Gratiae*), hand in hand with the Nymphs, beat the ground with one foot after the other” (*Odes* 1.4.5-6 [Rudd, LCL]); “the Grace (*Gratia*) along with the Nymphs and her twin sisters ventures to lead the dances (*choros*) naked” (*Odes.* 4.7.5-6 [Rudd, LCL]).

¹⁰³ Lonsdale, *Dance and Ritual*, 29.

¹⁰⁴ So Walter Burkert: “Rhythmically repeated movement ... performed together *as a group* is, as it were, ritual crystallized in its purest form” (*Greek Religion* [trans. John Raffan; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985], 102 [emphasis added]).

reader that she is a worshiper of God, the fact that she dances *alone* suggests that that she is the only one present who may be so categorized. The scene thus adds another dimension to the author's portrait of Mary: in addition to being exceptionally and distinctively pure, she enjoys a unique relationship with the God of Israel.

The reader therefore understands Mary's role in the temple, at least with respect to her dancing, as comparable to that of the Muses and Charites: the education of would-be worshipers in the ways of worship. And like these dancing goddesses, Mary's dance results not from her own initiative but from a higher divine agency. But unlike the Muses and Charites, whose presence is typically welcomed and even invoked by those they inspire, Mary's instruction is largely unsuccessful: her dance engenders the love of those gathered, but it does not inspire them to do likewise.

All of this is not to confirm Benko's thesis on the elevation of the Virgin to the status of divinity. While certain stanzas in the Hymn of the Dance characterize dancing as a divine activity that the disciples enter through imitation, evidence from the HB/LXX resists this interpretation. In the Exodus narrative, dancing is an entirely human action; an expression of worship, yes, but with no indication that the dancers are in some way emulating YHWH. Similarly, in the account of David's transportation of the ark, dancing is as an act of humility on the part of the king; he dances in order to *distinguish* rather than *equate* himself with God. The dancing Virgin is therefore understood not as a goddess, but as a worshiper of God *par excellence*.

In stark contrast to the stubborn and faithless generation criticized by Jesus for its failure to "dance" (in Matt 11:16-17; Luke 7:31-32), Mary's dancing assumes a prescient character. The joy and grace that animate her movement testify not only to God's favoring of her but also to her eager anticipation of the redemption that will be wrought through her.

Mary is therefore cast in the reader's mind as a sort of prototypical disciple, the first to respond positively to the ministry and message of her son. And certainly the reader who hears Jesus' criticism in Matthew and Luke in light of this image will entertain the thought that there was one who danced when she was summoned to do so.

3.5. Conclusion

From a survey of the history of scholarship, it is clear that Mary's residence in the temple is a commentary on her exceptional purity: she could not live in the temple if she were not already pure, and the fact that she remains there during her formative years ensures that her status when she departs has remained unchanged. The significance of this episode is layered through closer examination of Mary's being fed by the hand of an angel and her dancing on the steps of the altar. In light of comparable tales of miraculous feeding in the HB/LXX and Greek literature, her angelic diet suggests that her time in the temple is one of preservation toward her role in God's redemption of Israel. Drawing from images of dancing persons in the HB/LXX, early Christian literature, and Greek and Latin sources, her dancing may also be interpreted as an act of worship and communion with God. I concluded by suggesting that it also echoes the actions of the Muses and the Charites, and that it is distinct insofar as it is performed alone. This, I maintain, establishes her in the reader's mind as the quintessential worshiper of Israel's God and as the prototype of future discipleship.

CHAPTER 4 - THE VIRGIN, THE SPINNER (PJ 10-12)

What I in my little room
 Span so fine and slight,—
 As was likely, I presume—
 Came at last to light.

Goethe, *The Spinner*

After Mary leaves the temple, the priests summon her to spin thread for a new veil. As she works, an angel delivers the news of her pregnancy. Some have suggested that the author's portrayal of Mary spinning is apologetic, countering the claim that she spun to make ends meet, others that it is indicative of her virtue, intended to portray her as laudable. Without questioning the validity of these claims, I argue that her work forges a relationship between herself, Jesus, and the temple, and that it signifies a correspondence between the thread of the veil and Jesus' flesh.

Three sources of intertextual resonance layer the significance of this episode for the reader. First, the *Moirae*, goddesses responsible for the "spinning" of fate, allow the reader to see Mary's work as participation in the forces that govern human and divine destiny. But second, the Synoptic rending of the veil at the crucifixion (*velum scissum*), the "cutting" of Mary's thread by God, suggests that hers is a work cooperative with the divine will. Finally, the Epistle to the Hebrews serves as a sounding board for these connections, further defining the extent of the Virgin's power in relation to God. As the willing vehicle of the incarnation, her role in the process of redemption—and thus human fate—is pivotal. On the other hand, the correspondence between the work of her hands and the child in her womb, understood as none other than the God of whom she declares herself a servant, locates Mary squarely within the divine plan, subordinate to the very thread that she spins.

4.1. Introductory Matter

In iconography of the annunciation, Mary is often portrayed as reading or spinning. The reading Virgin becomes in the Middle Ages *the* paradigm for artistic representations of the annunciation, replacing the more ancient image of the spinning Virgin. Giotto de Bondone's frescoes in the Paduan *Capella degli Scrovegni* (ca. 1305) are a case in point. Two separate panels depict the annunciation to Anna concerning Mary and the annunciation to Mary concerning Jesus. In the first, Anna prays while another woman spins outside her door. In the second, Mary kneels, clutching a book in her right hand. Many of the images in the chapel are ultimately derived from PJ, but the fresco of Mary's own annunciation favors neither PJ nor the Gospel of Luke.¹ The spinning imagery, while still present to a degree, is transferred to the periphery of Anna's annunciation while the Virgin's thread is supplanted by a book: Mary the spinner yields to Mary the student.²

The spinning Virgin has also been reworked on occasion into the "weaving" Virgin. The transformation is already apparent in *Pseudo-Matthew*, where weaving, not spinning, is part of her daily schedule (6.2), and where she and the other virgins cast lots to see who will weave (*nere*) which colors for the temple veil (8.5).³ The reshaping persists in some modern

¹ The Joachim cycle includes his being driven from the temple, his sojourn in the wilderness, his sacrifice following the news of Anna's pregnancy, and his reunion with Anna. The Mary cycle includes her birth, her presentation in the temple, the widowers and their rods, and her wedding procession and marriage to Joseph. Similar scenes (noted in Cartlidge and Elliott, *Art*, 33-35) are depicted in the mosaics of the *Basilica Cattedrale Patriarcale di San Marco* in Venice.

² The image of Mary reading at the annunciation, according to Pamela Sheingorn, postdates the eleventh century when, "concomitant with the growth of Mary's cult, the idea developed that because she was the Mother of God, Mary must have been both spiritually and intellectually gifted" ("The Wise Mother": The Image of St. Anne Teaching the Virgin Mary," *Gesta* 32 [1993]: 69).

³ *Nere* may be used in reference to spinning, but it most often refers to work that implies the intertwining of thread. Mary does not weave while she receives the angel's message in *Ps.-Mt.* Rather,

scholarship, Vuong referring to Mary's "selection as a Temple weaver" in PJ, and Hock to Elizabeth working at a *loom* "like Mary."⁴

To be sure, Mary as weaver or weaver's loom is a common Patristic trope. In a study of selected homilies of Proclus of Constantinople, Nicholas Conostas illustrates the frequency with which Proclus speaks of Mary's womb (γαστήρ) as a workshop (ἐργαστήριον) containing a loom (ἱστός) "upon which a human body was gracefully woven into a garment befitting the Word made flesh."⁵ She is for Proclus "the awesome loom (ἱστός) of the divine economy on which the robe of union was ineffably woven (ἀρρήτως ὑφάνθη ὁ τῆς ἐνώσεως χιτῶν)" (*Hom.* 1.1.21-22). The Holy Spirit is the "loom-worker (ἱστουργός)," and the thread (κρόκης) for the robe is the "spotless flesh of the Virgin" (*Hom.* 1.1.22-24). Conostas sees PJ, "the apocryphal

she remains outside, next to the fountain (*Ps.-Mt.* 9). Similarly in Maximus the Confessor's *Life*, the annunciation happens near a fountain "because she conceived the fountain of life" (19; Shoemaker, *Life*, 50).

⁴ Hock, *Infancy Gospels*, 55; Vuong, *Accessing*, 128, 141. So also Barker: "She worked as a weaver ... [she] was weaving a new veil for the temple" (*Christmas: The Original Story* [London: SPCK, 2008], 142-43). Daniel M. Gurtner's transformation of the spinner is particularly imaginative: "A tradition from the *Protevangelium of James* ... reports that Mary herself had, as a child, woven the veil of the temple that was torn [at Jesus' death], and '[W]hen a needle accidentally pricked her finger, she was given a foretaste of the pain she would feel at the crucifixion' " ("The Veil of the Temple in History and Legend," *JETS* 49 [2006]: 106). Gurtner here quotes Howard Clarke (*The Gospel of Matthew and Its Readers: A Historical Introduction to the First Gospel* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003], 238). Both seem entirely unaware that the tradition of Mary weaving, let alone pricking her finger with a needle, is nowhere present in PJ.

⁵ The idea of the λόγος needing a garment is linked with the concept of *kenosis* in Paul (Phil 2:7): self-emptying involves the shedding a divine garment and the "putting on" of a human garment. So Conostas: "To empty oneself in the folds of a human form ... was to be inexorably swaddled in a garment of suffering and death, for 'being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross' (Phil 2:8)" (*Proclus of Constantinople and the Cult of the Virgin in Late Antiquity: Homilies 1-5, Texts and Translations* [VCSup 66; Leiden: Brill, 2003], 316, 320).

wellspring of Marian legends,” as the source of the image of the Virgin as the loom of the Word made flesh.⁶

It is tempting to read this imagery into PJ, but while the narrative certainly serves as a seedbed for these images, they themselves are foreign to it: PJ’s Virgin is a *spinner*, not a *weaver*. Though related, they are activities of different sorts, involving separate tools, terminology, and skill sets.⁷ To make the distinction may seem pedantic, but the privileging of one is a choice on the part of the author that should be respected in any primary interpretation of the text.

4.2. The Author and the Text

Mary’s spinning does not exist to give data pertaining to her daily routine. On that proposition most scholars agree.⁸ But the motivation behind its inclusion remains unresolved. Two positions are more or less representative: first, that it is apologetic, penned in response to certain unfavorable claims regarding Mary; and second, that it is *encomiastic*, contributing to the author’s goal of praising her. I begin with a survey of these positions,

⁶ Constatas, *Proclus*, 325. On Mary and weaving, Andrew Louth comments: “I know that [she] is said to be *spinning* thread, not weaving, but it is clear that the end result is the veil (see *Protevangelion* 10.1), and it is striking that from the time of Proclus of Constantinople ... onwards, when the imagery already there in the *Protevangelion* is suddenly developed, the metaphor seems to glide almost unconsciously from spinning to weaving, and Mary’s womb is thought of as a loom rather than a spindle” (“John of Damascus on the Mother of God as a Link Between Humanity and God,” in *The Cult of the Mother of God in Byzantium: Texts and Images* [BBOS; eds. Leslie Brubaker and Mary B. Cunningham; Farnham: Ashgate, 2011], 156).

⁷ So Dorothea Forstner, *Die Welt der christlichen Symbole* (3d ed.; Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 1977), 407-9.

⁸ An exception is Foscett, who considers Mary’s spinning and drawing water her “domestic chores” that “serve as the narrative’s only illustration of the protagonist at work” (*Virgin Conceived*, 151).

and then note several aspects of the material that are historically suspect. I conclude by addressing a study in which Zervos attempts to reconstruct what he considers the more ancient form of the narrative.

4.2.1. Spinning as Apologetic/*Encomiastic*

Those who read the presentation of Mary's spinning as apologetic often refer to the second-century Greek philosopher Celsus, who claimed in his *True Doctrine* that Jesus was born "from a common woman, a poor spinner (ἀπὸ γυναικὸς ἐγγωρίου καὶ πενιχρᾶς καὶ χερνήτιδος)" (Origen, *Cels.* 1.28). PJ's author, by contrast, asserts that Mary's father was "exceedingly wealthy" (1:1) and that she spun as an employee of the temple.⁹ In fact, Cothenet suggests that the author's chief goal in writing is to supplement canonical references to Mary, the paucity of which left her open to libel like that of Celsus. And it is in this same spirit that van Stempvoort labels the text as an *apologia pro Maria* in narrative form.¹⁰

While Hock acknowledges the arguments for reading PJ as an apology, he maintains that this is not its central motivation. Instead, he classifies the text as belonging to the genre

⁹ So Amann: "If Mary is spinning, it is not as a mercenary; the work assigned her is honorable, reserved for the purest of the tribe of David" (*Protévangile*, 218). Also Smid: "Mary does spin, but not for the reason given by Celsus. In the service of the Sanctuary she does sacred work" (*Protevangeliium Jacobi*, 80). Allen contends that PJ is apologetic, but that its focus is less on Mariology in particular than Christianity in general: Celsus's primary concerns were not Mariological. Rather, he "is making a larger point about the nature of the Christian movement." And the author of PJ responds "by stressing in narrative form the typological anticipation of Christianity in the scriptural records of Jewish history" ("Insufficiency," 516).

¹⁰ Van Stempvoort, "Protevangeliium Jacobi," 410. So also Cothenet, "Le Protévangile de Jacques," *ANRW* 25.6, 4256-57;

encomium.¹¹ Its primary purpose, he suggests, is to depict Mary as one worthy of praise. Her spinning contributes to her portrait as paragon of righteousness: her profession “functions less to counter the attack that she spun for a living than to underscore [her] virtue.” The Virgin’s having spun thread for the temple veil, the “most virtuous of all women’s tasks,” would most certainly be an accomplishment of note and thus worthy of inclusion in an *encomium* to her.¹²

The line between *apologia* and *encomium* is often difficult to draw: *apologiae* typically incorporate some degree of praise, and *encomia* may be written in response to an idea or person.¹³ The positions are therefore distinct but not mutually exclusive. A point on which they agree is that the image of Mary as spinner exists for her own sake, whether to defend or to praise her. Both perspectives thus answer certain questions concerning the author’s choice of vocation for the Virgin, but neither is particularly well equipped to address her spinning in its narrative context.

¹¹ On *encomium*, see Stanley Frederick Bonner, *Education in Ancient Rome: From the Elder Cato to the Younger Pliny* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 250-76.

¹² Hock, *Infancy Gospels*, 15-16. So also Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 152. Hock’s identification of PJ as an *encomium* is striking, but the notion that Mary’s spinning legitimates praise of her is dubious. She is not the only character in PJ who spins: seven other virgins are called to the temple (PJ 10:3), and Elizabeth is working with thread when Mary visits her (PJ 12:4). And why would an author whose goal is praise of Mary have any interest in representing other women as engaged in equally virtuous tasks? This of course does not invalidate the hypothesis that PJ shares certain characteristics with the genre *encomium*, but it raises questions with respect to the role of Mary’s spinning within the alleged *encomiastic* project of PJ.

¹³ So Elliott, “Mary in the Apocryphal New Testament,” in *Origins of the Cult of the Virgin Mary* [ed. Chris Maunder; London: Burns & Oates, 2008], 59).

4.2.2. Historical Peculiarities

Several historical questions arise from the material. The first is the reference to virgins who are “of the tribe of David,” a designation that conflicts with both the HB/LXX and the NT: a specific tribe of David is not mentioned in the former, and in the latter it is Joseph, not Mary, who is descended from David. The second is the author’s presentation of the temple veil as a novelty. As noted in Chapter Three, during the time when this episode allegedly takes place (first century B.C.E.), the veil would have been an integral part of the temple “furniture.” What is more, instructions for its construction and positioning, both in the desert tabernacle and Jerusalem temple, are frequent in the HB/LXX.¹⁴ Finally, there are discrepancies between the colors and materials that comprise the veil in PJ and those attested in the HB/LXX and elsewhere.

4.2.2.1. The Tribe of David

In PJ 10:4, the high priest remembers that Mary, along with the other virgins called to spin thread for the veil, is “of the tribe of David (ἀπὸ τῆς φυλῆς τοῦ Δαυίδ).” The underlying claim seems to be that she is from David’s *own* tribe, i.e., Judah. As Christian Maurer observes, φυλή need not imply “tribe” in the technical sense, but may simply describe a group bound by common descent.¹⁵ But the author’s use of φυλή in this instance is jarring, since φυλῆς τοῦ Δαυίδ is an unfamiliar way of indicating Davidic descent. Hock

¹⁴ So Exod 26:31, 33–35, 37; 27:21; 30:6; 35:12; 36:35, 37; 38:18; 36:34; 38:27; 39:40; 40:3, 5, 21–22, 26; Lev 4:6, 17; 16:2, 12, 15; 21:23; 24:3; Num 3:10, 26; 4:5, 32; 18:7; 1 Kgs 6:36; 2 Chr 3:14; 1 Macc 1:22; 4:51; Sir 50:5.

¹⁵ Maurer, “φυλή,” *TDNT* 9:245–50.

passes over the reference in a footnote: “There was no tribe of David.”¹⁶ Michael Mach’s dismissal is even more efficient: “The priests look for seven seven virgins ‘from the tribe of David’ (sic!).”¹⁷ Φυλή is most often found in PJ in the plural, referring to the collective tribes of Israel.¹⁸ The two exceptions are found in the spinning material: one refers to the undefiled virgins in general (PJ 10:2) while the other refers to Mary in particular (PJ 10:4). Together they detail the impressive pedigree necessary to spin thread for the veil: out of the nation of Israel, only those from David’s lineage are called, and within David’s lineage, only the undefiled virgins.

The claim that Mary is descended from David is standard fare in first- and second-century Christian literature.¹⁹ Ignatius of Antioch writes that Jesus was “of the family of

¹⁶ Hock, *Infancy Gospels*, 51 n. 10.2.

¹⁷ Mach, “Are There Jewish Elements in the ‘Protevangelium Jacobi?’” in *Proceedings of the 9th World Congress of Jewish Studies, Jerusalem, Aug 1985* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1986), 216. So also Fosskett, “Virgin Conceived,” 106. Outside of PJ, references to a “tribe of David” in early Christian literature are rare. Epiphanius employs the phrase with reference to certain unbelievers (ἀπιστοῦντες) who question how Mary, from the tribe of David (ἀπὸ φυλῆς Δαυίδ), might be related to Elizabeth, from the tribe of Levi (ἀπὸ τοῦ Λευί) (*Pan.* 3.464.22). As the author of PJ is familiar with Luke, one would perhaps expect either of two Lukan phrases: “from the house of David (ἐξ οἴκου Δαυίδ)” (1:27) or “from the house and lineage of David (ἐξ οἴκου καὶ πατριᾶς Δαυίδ)” (2:4). In Luke it is not Mary but *Joseph* who is said to be of the house of David (so also Matt 1:20). According to John Chrysostom, Luke’s ἐξ οἴκου Δαυίδ is best understood as applying to Mary (*Nativ.* [MPG 49.354.43-44]). The only LXX reference to anything like a tribe of David is in Zechariah, which mentions the “tribe of the house of David (φυλὴ οἴκου Δαυίδ)” (Zech 12:12).

¹⁸ Joachim is mentioned in “The Records of the Twelve Tribes of Israel (ταῖς ἱστορίαις τῶν δώδεκα φυλῶν τοῦ Ἰσραήλ)” (PJ 1:1); also 1:6: “The Twelve Tribes of the People (τὴν δωδεκάφυλον τοῦ λαοῦ).” This may be a “lost” source akin to the so-called *Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah* (2 Chron 16:11; 24:27; 27:7; 32:32) or the so-called *Book of the Wars of YHWH* (Num 21:14). Smid suggests that it is a genealogical table (*Protevangelium Jacobi*, 25); van Stempvoort, that it refers to the OT in its entirety, and that the author is here attempting to link his or her narrative with Israel’s (“Protevangelium Jacobi,” 415-16). Similarly, Anna addresses “all the people of Israel (ὅλον τὸν λαὸν τοῦ Ἰσραήλ)” whom Joachim had invited to a banquet in honor of Mary’s first birthday (PJ 6:6): “Listen you twelve tribes of Israel (αἱ δώδεκα φυλαὶ τοῦ Ἰσραήλ)” (PJ 6:13). Finally, “all the tribes of the people (αἱ φυλαὶ τοῦ λαοῦ)” mourn the death of Zechariah (PJ 24:11).

¹⁹ Following Theodor Zahn, Walter Bauer claims PJ as the source of the tradition of Mary’s Davidic descent (*Das Leben Jesu im Zeitalter der neutestamentlichen Apokryphen* [Tübingen: Mohr,

David according to the flesh (ἐκ γένους Δαυὶδ κατὰ σάρκα) (*Smyrn.* 1.1), “conceived by Mary according to God’s plan, both from the seed of David (ἐκ σπέρματος ... Δαυίδ) and the Holy Spirit” (*Eph.* 18.2).²⁰ Justin Martyr asserts that Jesus “submitted to becoming incarnate, to be born through this virgin of the family of David (ἀπὸ τοῦ γένους τοῦ Δαυεὶδ)” (*Dial.* 45.4.6-7), and that he is Son of Man by virtue of his birth from the Virgin “who was of the family of David (ἀπὸ τοῦ Δαυεὶδ ... γένους)” (*Dial.* 100.3). Mary’s Davidic heritage appears alongside that of Joseph in the *Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah*: “I saw of the family of David the prophet a woman named Mary, who was a virgin, and betrothed to a man called Joseph, a carpenter, and he also was of the seed and family of the righteous David” (11.2; *NTApoc*² 2:618).²¹

So while the ἀπὸ φυλῆς τοῦ Δαυίδ is an unusual way of stating Mary’s Davidic heritage, the underlying emphasis is not uncommon. In light of PJ’s use of φυλή, and in the context of first- and second-century Christian authors who emphasize Mary’s Davidic descent, it seems unlikely that the author of PJ refers in error to a specific “tribe of David.” It is more likely that he or she establishes Mary’s royal lineage through evocation of David’s name in order to stress that Jesus is descended from David. And Mary’s Davidic descent, Bauckham observes, is a consequence of the author’s preoccupation with her being a virgin,

1909; repr., Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1967], 13 n. 2). The assertion of *Jesus’* Davidic heritage is of course early, as Paul, probably quoting an earlier formula, calls him “the one born from the seed of David according to the flesh (ἐκ σπέρματος Δαυὶδ κατὰ σάρκα)” (Rom 1:3).

²⁰ Similarly in Ignatius, *Trall.* 9.1: Jesus was “of the family of David (τοῦ ἐκ γένους Δαυίδ), son of Mary.”

²¹ So also *3 Cor* 3.5 (*Acts of Paul*): Jesus “was born from Mary, from the seed of David, when the Holy Spirit was sent from heaven into her by the Father.” And later, in Maximus the Confessor’s *Life*: “[Mary] too was from the house and family of David” (33; Shoemaker, *Life*, 64).

which requires that “Jesus’ descent from David must be traced through Mary, not (as in Matthew and Luke) through Joseph.”²²

4.2.2.2. The Veil as Novelty

On the creation of the veil, it is at least implied that the priests are commissioning something new. That the author portrays them as creating a veil *de novo* is often cited as evidence of his or her lack of familiarity with temple practices, leading Foster to conclude that “the incident is historically and factually inaccurate.”²³

It is possible that the author here narrates the creation of a *replacement* veil. Accounts of its having been exchanged on occasion do exist. Frédéric Manns notes that not only do the *Mishnah* and *Talmud* preserve traditions about the creation of replacement veils, but also that these traditions include the participation of virgins: “The veil (פרכת) was a handbreadth thick, and was woven on a loom of seventy-two cords, and each cord was made up of twenty-four threads. It was forty cubits long, and twenty cubits broad. It was made by eighty-two young girls. And they make two a year” (*Šeqal.* 8.5; Neusner 264).²⁴ Manns suggests that PJ’s account is peculiar only in its depiction of eight rather than eighty-two virgins being called to spin.²⁵

²² Bauckham, *Jude*, 26.

²³ Foster, “Protevangelium,” 577.

²⁴ Also *Tam.* 29b; *Hull.* 90a.

²⁵ Manns, *Essais sur le judéo-christianisme* (ASBF 12; Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1977), 108).

The veil was also taken from the temple more than once as plunder, requiring that a substitute be made. In 1 Maccabees, Antiochus IV Epiphanes loots the temple and removes the veil (καταπέτασμα) along with other spoils (1:20-23). And later, at the rededication of the temple, new veils (καταπετάσματα) are stretched out (1 Macc 4:51). Josephus' retelling of these events is similar: "[Antiochus] took away the vessels of God: the gold candlesticks, the gold altar, the table, the altars (θυσιαστήρια), and even the veils (καταπετασμάτων)" (*Ant.* 12.5.4 [250]).²⁶ The condition of the temple having being pillaged would certainly warrant the fabrication of a new veil, but the author intimates no such event.

Another possible explanation is that Herod's expansion of the temple complex, referenced in John 1:19-20, would have been in progress at this time. If the author is familiar with Herod's project, then it is feasible that he or she depicts the priests who commission the veil as participating in the renovation. The combination of the author's *positive* view of the temple and *negative* view of Herod makes this hypothesis unlikely. Even if the author is aware of Herod's renovation (which is not immediately clear), it is doubtful that he or she would be interested in depicting Herod, whose character in PJ is thoroughly wicked, as contributing to the betterment of the temple.²⁷

²⁶ Josephus also recounts Titus's plundering of the temple in 70 C.E.: "He also handed over to him the veils (καταπετάσματα), the garments of the high priests (ἀρχιερέων), the stones, and many other vessels used in temple service" (*J.W.* 6.8.3 [389]).

²⁷ So R. T. France: "Herod is well cast for the role of the wicked and jealous king. And lest it be thought that Christianity was somehow immune from the appeal of this motif, we should not forget the dragon's frustrated pursuit of the newborn child in Revelation xii, and the reappearance of Herod himself in the same role in the *Protevangelium Jacobi* xxii, where the baby John the Baptist is rescued from the massacre by a miraculous split in the mountain" ("Herod and the Children of Bethlehem," *NovT* 21 [1979]: 99). It also seems as if Herod's renovations did not affect the temple itself or its interior (Carol Meyers, "Temple, Jerusalem," *ABD* 6:366).

4.2.2.3. A Veil of Many Colors

Discrepancies likewise exist as to colors and materials that constitute the veil. The high priest in PJ lists *seven*: gold (χρυσός), white (ἀμίαντος), linen (βύσσος), silk (σιρικόν), blue (βάκινθος), scarlet (κόκκινος) and purple (πορφύρα) (PJ 10:7). But according to the seminal account in Exod 26:31, the veil was to be comprised of *four*: blue (βάκινθος), scarlet (κόκκινος), purple (πορφύρα) and linen (βύσσος). These are again reflected in the construction of the first veil in LXX Exod 36:35 (also 2 Chr 3:14).

Philo names these four colors and reflects on the elemental symbolism of each: the linen stands for earth (γῆ), the purple for water (ὕδωρ), the blue for air (ἀήρ) and the scarlet for fire (πῦρ) (*Moses* 2:88). Josephus recalls the symbolism in a fashion similar to Philo, although he equates purple more specifically with the sea (θάλασσα) (*J.W.* 5:213). Clement of Alexandria repeats these colors and their referents: “Both the covering and the veil were embroidered in blue, purple, scarlet and linen ... for purple is from water and linen from earth, and blue, being dark, is like air, and scarlet is likened to fire” (*Strom.* 5:6). In adding to this “canon,” the author of PJ is either unaware of the four-color tradition or has chosen to deviate from it.

Amann argues that the author increases the number of the traditional colors to seven to ensure that the virgins gathered all have a specific material to spin.²⁸ His suggestion is not without problems: while seven convene at the outset, the addition of Mary brings their number to eight. Additionally, Mary receives two colors, which would leave at least some of

²⁸ Amann, *Protévangile*, 220.

the other virgins wanting for materials to work with.²⁹ In the HB/LXX, five colors are used in the composition of various temple fabrics, including but not limited to the veil: specifically, gold comprises part of the priest's ephod (Exod 28:8).³⁰ It is at least possible that the author of PJ simply conflates the thread for the veil and that of the temple vestments. This of course does not account for the *σιρικός* or *ἀμλάντος*, neither of which is associated with temple textiles in the LXX.³¹

A final possibility is that the additional colors may echo a tradition also visible in 2 *Baruch*, where the seer refers to “virgins who spin fine linen, and silk with gold of Ophir” (2 *Bar.* 10:19; *OTP* 1:624).³² This reference is part of a larger lamentation delivered in the temple, before its destruction, so it is presumed that these virgins are spinning there. They are mentioned directly after instructions are given to the priests regarding “the keys of the sanctuary,” so it is possible that they are understood as spinning thread for the veil, the “door” of the sanctuary. This would account for the silk and gold, but it does not solve the

²⁹ Moreover, he suggests that Papyrus Bodmer V originally had six rather than seven colors, and that the corrector of the Papyrus added “the true purple” (“An Early Non-Canonical Annunciation Story,” 675).

³⁰ Barker, on the reciprocity of the veil and temple vestments: “The veil symbolized all that stood between human perception and the vision of God, and the vestments symbolized the clothing of the divine in that same material world which also concealed it” (*The Gate of Heaven: The History and Symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem* [Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2008], 104). So also Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel: An Inquiry into the Character of Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 167.

³¹ *Σιρικός* appears nowhere in the LXX, and it appears once in the NT with reference to the cargo of Babylon (Rev 18:11-12). *Ἀμλάντος* appears in 2 Maccabees with reference to the temple itself (2 Macc 14:36; 15:34), and in Wisdom of Solomon with reference to a woman who is undefiled (3:13), prizes for those who remain in virtue (4:2), and the body from which Solomon was born (8:20).

³² This connection is proposed briefly, i.e., without any commentary, by A. F. J. Klijn in *OTP* 1:625.

problem of the white thread, which is not mentioned in *2 Baruch*. Further research into this connection is needed before it can be corroborated with any certainty.

4.2.3. Alleged Interpolations

Zervos argues that the current form of the narrative has been heavily and perhaps haphazardly edited. Basing his claim on the interpolations of a second scribe of Papyrus Bodmer V, he reconstructs what he considers the more ancient narrative. In it, Mary never leaves the temple and is seated in the holy of holies, on the very throne of God, when she hears the angel's message.³³ With respect to Elizabeth's reaction to Mary's arrival at her home, he suggests that "there is no apparent reason for Elizabeth to have in her possession what we may assume to be scarlet thread. Rather, it seems likely that in the process of editing this section of PJ the redactor could have inadvertently detached this one line from its original position in the GM annunciation story and placed it in the Elizabeth passage."³⁴ And in this earlier narrative it is Mary, not Elizabeth, who puts down the scarlet thread in order to grab her water pitcher.

Zervos also notes an inconsistency in Mary's response to Elizabeth's blessing. In Papyrus Bodmer V, she says, "Who am I that, behold, all the women of the earth will bless me (τίς εἰμι ἐγὼ ὅτι ἰδοὺ πᾶσαι αἱ γυναῖκες τῆς γῆς μακαριοῦσίν με)?" She has only been blessed by one woman, and yet she refers to many women. The majority of MSS in this instance replace "all the women (πᾶσαι αἱ γυναῖκες)" with "all the generations (πᾶσαι αἱ γενεαί)."³⁵ But

³³ For the "original" annunciation story, see *ibid.*, 688.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 671-72.

³⁵ So Zervos, "Prolegomena," 298. The editions of both Tischendorf and Hock read πᾶσαι αἱ

Zervos acknowledges that this does not solve the issue of the future tense (μακαριοῦσιν) in Mary's question, which in the original narrative is addressed to the priest: "This blessing has just happened in the past and there is nothing in the text to lead Mary to believe that anyone — much less all the women of the earth — is going to bless her in the future."³⁶ Even if this is the case, a discrepancy remains with respect to the claim that she will be "praised in all generations (ἐν πάσαις ταῖς γενεαῖς)" and her question regarding the blessing of "all the women of the earth (πᾶσαι αἱ γυναῖκες τῆς γῆς)."³⁷

Zervos's study addresses many of the literary and historical peculiarities present in the narrative, and his observations are invaluable in charting a path through it. Even so, the consequence of relying on the reconstruction of a simpler, hypothetically earlier version is that the less savory bits of the narrative may simply be smoothed over as later accretions. Thus while his hypothesis is helpful in resolving the tensions that arise in the course of Mary's spinning, it is less helpful in examining the narrative in its present form.

γενεαί (Tischendorf, *Evangelia Apocrypha*, 24; Hock, *Infancy Gospels*, 54). Following Bodmer V, de Strycker's text reads πᾶσαι αἱ γυναῖκες (*Forme*, 120). This reading brings Mary's response into closer proximity with the Lukan *Magnificat*, in which Mary's being blessed by generations is not a question but a statement of fact: "Behold, from now on all generations will bless me (μακαριοῦσίν με πᾶσαι αἱ γενεαί)" (Luke 1:48b). It also harmonizes her response with the blessing of the high priest: "you will be praised in all the generations of the earth (ἔσῃ εὐλογημένη ἐν πάσαις ταῖς γενεαῖς τῆς γῆς)" (PJ 12:2). This reading also allows for the fact that the *in utero* John the Baptist also blesses Mary when she arrives at Elizabeth's door (PJ 12:5).

³⁶ Zervos, "An Early Non-Canonical Annunciation Story," 672.

³⁷ So idem: this exemplifies "the redactor's characteristic inattention to detail in harmonizing his original GM source with the interpolated Lukan material" (*ibid.*, 674).

4.3. Literary Analysis of PJ 10-12

Mary's spinning is framed by the assignment of Joseph as her husband (PJ 9) and the annunciation concerning the conception and birth of Jesus (PJ 11). It serves three purposes in the narrative, all of which involve the temple: first, it facilitates a relationship between her and the temple after Joseph has taken her home; second, it proves to the priests and the reader that, in her absence from the temple, Mary remains virginal (*παρθένος*); and third, as it supplies the context for the annunciation, it forms a textual bridge by which she, the temple, and Jesus are linked. This third point is reinforced during her visits to the high priest and Elizabeth. It is also in the midst of this material, itself foreign to the NT, that the narrative begins to run alongside the accounts of the nativity in Matthew and Luke.

Mary ceases to spin at the start of PJ 12, but a case can be made for including her visit to Elizabeth under the rubric of "spinning material." Although spinning is less prominent in chapter 12, it is present nonetheless, for Elizabeth seems to be spinning when Mary arrives (PJ 12:4). At the level of structure, Mary's journeying to and from her home frames these episodes and gives them coherence: she leaves her home at the beginning of chapter 10 and returns to it after her visit with Elizabeth. This structure is reinforced by a pattern of three separate trips in the larger whole.³⁸ I therefore suggest that PJ 10-12 may be read as a literary unit.

³⁸ Joseph leaves Mary at home in PJ 9:12, and after she joins the other virgins at the temple she returns home to spin (PJ 10:8). She leaves home to fetch water in PJ 11:1, and returns when frightened by the voice (PJ 11:4). The final sequence is more complex, but the pattern is still present. Mary leaves her home in PJ 12:1 to take her thread to the high priest, but instead of returning home afterward she goes to visit Elizabeth (PJ 10:3). Only after she has been there for three months does Mary return home. As was the case with her returning home in PJ 11, when Mary leaves after her stay with Elizabeth, it is out of fear (PJ 12:8).

4.3.1. The Virgin Spinner

After Joseph brings Mary home, a council of priests commissions a veil for the temple (PJ 10:1). They summon the undefiled virgins (τὰς παρθένους τὰς ἀμιάντους) of the tribe of David, and when seven are gathered, the high priest remembers that Mary is a Davidide and he calls her as well (PJ 10:2-5). He says to them, “Cast lots for me (λάχετέ μοι) here! Who will spin (νήσει) the gold, the white, the linen, the silk, the blue, the scarlet and the true purple?” (PJ 10:6-7). Mary is chosen to spin the scarlet and the true purple, and she takes them home to begin her work (PJ 10:6-8). After this, Zechariah becomes unable to speak, and is replaced by Samuel as the high priest (PJ 10:9).³⁹ While this is happening, Mary has already begun spinning (κλώθειν) the scarlet thread (PJ 10:10).

Three verbs describe Mary’s work: νείν, κλώθειν, and ἔλκειν (PJ 10:7, 10; 11:4). The first two are used commonly in Greek literature with reference to spinning. Hesiod employs νείν to refer to the activity of a spider: “The twelfth [day] is much better than the eleventh. It is on that day that the high-flying spider (ἀερσιπότητος ἀράχνης) spins (νή) its webs” (*Op.* 777 [Most, LCL]).⁴⁰ With respect to κλώθειν, Herodotus (ca. 484-425 B.C.E.) recounts the story

³⁹ According to Hock, the narrator is “clearly, if awkwardly, trying to place his narrative within the framework of the canonical accounts” (*Infancy Gospels*, 51). Also Vuong, on the implicit connection between Zechariah and Mary: “As part of the priestly line, Zechariah is not elected, but chosen by lot in God’s providence akin to the manner that Mary is chosen by lot and God’s will to perform the sacred task of weaving the temple veil ... This scene may serve to imply in yet another way that the link between Mary and the Temple remains mysteriously close, in a manner that will not become fully evident until after her motherhood of the messiah” (*Accessing*, 146).

⁴⁰ Similarly in a play of Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* recounts an interaction with her husband: “He said that if I didn’t spin (νήσω) [my] thread, my head would wail loudly” (*Lys.* 519-20). Also Plato, on the various arts of carding wool (ξαντική) and spinning (νηστική) (*Pol.* 282.a.6). So also Lucian, *Fug.* 12.9-11; *Dial. meretr.* 6. The Pseudo-Homeric *Batrachomyomachia* (182-183) recounts an exchange between Athena and Zeus that involves spinning. Also Sophocles, “to spin robes and tunics of linen (πέπλους τε νῆσαι λινόγενεῖς τ’ ἐπενδύτας)” (*Frag.* 439). Νείν may also refer to the act of *swimming* (Aristotle, *Hist. an.* 489b.32-35; 490a.2-3; 524.11-13; *Inc. an.* 709b.13-15; [*Probl.*] 933a.10-

of two Paeonians who send their sister to draw water in a most unusual way: “having a vessel of water on her head, dragging a horse by a short bridle, and spinning (κλώθουσιν) thread” (*Hist.* 5.12 [Godley, LCL]). In LXX Exodus, νήθειν (derived from νείν) and κλώθειν are activities related the production of cloth used in the tabernacle. Both are employed interchangeably to render the Hebrew עָלַת, “yarn,” but κλώθειν is used exclusively to translate שָׁרַר, “to twist” (e.g., LXX Exod 26:36; 36:36).⁴¹ They occur most often in LXX Exod 25-37, and there only referring to things made for the tabernacle or priestly garments.⁴²

Whenever the creation of a veil (καταπέτασμα) is narrated in LXX Exodus, these same verbs always occur in tandem. Exodus 26:31 includes the command to make a veil “from blue, purple, spun scarlet (κοκκίνου κεκλωσμένου), and spun linen (βύσσου νενησμένης).” The subsequent account of the veil’s creation in Exod 37:3 illustrates that the verbs are largely interchangeable, for the colors to which they were previously matched are transposed: “They made the veil (καταπέτασμα) from blue, purple, spun scarlet (κοκκίνου νενησμένου), and spun linen (βύσσου κεκλωσμένης).” They are also used in conjunction in the creation of the priest’s ephod (Exod 36:9), the veil (καταπέτασμα) for the door of the tabernacle (Exod 37:5), and the veil (καταπέτασμα) for the gate of the courtyard (Exod 37:16).⁴³

12; Josephus, *Ant.* 15:55; *J. W.* 4:477).

⁴¹ So also LXX Exod 36:9, 31, 36; 37:3, 5, 16.

⁴² The two verbs occur thirty-four times in the LXX, and thirty of those are in Exod 25-37. The exceptions are Lev 14:4, in which spun scarlet (κεκλωσμένον κόκκινον) is a component of an offering for a person with leprosy; Lev 14:49-51, in which spun scarlet (κεκλωσμένον κόκκινον) is a component of an offering to cleanse the house of a person with leprosy; and Sir 45:10, in which spun scarlet (κεκλωσμένη κόκκω) constitutes part of the priestly vestments.

⁴³ These veils are not to be confused with the veil in Exod 26:31 or 37:3, which is the inner veil before the holy of holies (so Gurtner, “LXX Syntax and the Identity of the NT Veil,” *NovT* 47 [2005]: 345-50).

“ἔλκειν, by contrast, seems an unusual means by which to detail the Virgin’s work.”⁴⁴

The verb is versatile in the LXX and NT. In the LXX it refers to animals pulling a yoke (Deut 21:3), persons being pulled out of trouble (2 Sam 22:17), the drawing in of breath (LXX Ps 118:131), and the dragging away of one’s enemies (Job 20:28). In the NT it refers to one being drawn to God (John 6:44) or the drawing of a sword (John 18:10).⁴⁵ It occurs only once more in PJ, when Joseph’s son leads (or “pulls”) the donkey to Bethlehem (PJ 17:5). De Strycker treats ἔλκειν as synonymous with νεῖν and κλώθειν, rendering all three “to spin (*filer*),” yet he acknowledges that this meaning is absent from Greek lexica.⁴⁶ He notes Hugo Blümner’s suggestion that ἔλκειν may be employed as a substitute for κατάγειν, which sometimes refers to the drawing of thread from a spindle.⁴⁷

At least two verbs employed by the author are appropriate to Mary’s task; evidence from LXX Exodus shows that both νεῖν and κλώθειν, especially in conjunction with one another, are fitting means by which to narrate the construction of the temple veil. It is therefore likely that the author is intentional about depicting Mary as spinning *actual* thread for the veil. But the literary significance of Mary’s spinning does not end with its lexical

⁴⁴ Some copyists sensed the difficulty; the extant MSS differ on what precisely Mary is doing at the annunciation. Many readings include various forms of ἐργάζεσθαι, although κλώθειν is likewise attested. For a list of variants, see Zervos, “Prolegomena,” 269.

⁴⁵ Additional instances of ἔλκειν in the LXX: Neh 9:30; 1 Macc 10:82; 3 Macc 4:7; 5:49; 4 Macc 11:9; 14:13; 15:11; Ps 9:30; Prov 25:20; Eccl 1:5; 2:3; Song 1:4; Job 28:18; 39:10; Wis 19:4; Sir 28:19; Hab 1:15; Is 10:15; Jer 14:6; 38:3; 45:13; Dan 4:17. In the NT: John 12:32; 21:6, 11; Acts 16:19; 21:30; Jas 2:6.

⁴⁶ De Strycker, *Forme*, 304. Similarly Amann, *Protévangile*, 223; Hock, *Infancy Gospels*, 53.

⁴⁷ Blümner (*Technologie und Terminologie der Gewerbe und Künste bei Griechen und Römern* [2d ed.; Leipzig: Teubner, 1912], 126) cites two instances where ἔλκειν is substituted for κατάγειν: the *Anthologia Palatina* 14.134.3-4 (πρεσβυτέρη δὲ θυγατέρων καὶ μνᾶν καὶ τρίτον εἴλκε κρόκης) (14.134.3-4); the *Etymologicum Magnum* in an entry defining κατάκλωθες, the “spinnings (ἐπικλώσεις)” of the *Moirae* (Αἱ ἐπικλώσεις τῶν Μοιρῶν, παρὰ τὸ κλώθω· τοῦτο δὲ παρὰ τὸ κάτω καθέλκειν τοὺς τῶν νημάτων ὀλκούς) (495.26).

accuracy: coupled with the historical peculiarities of the account cited above, the degree to which it is integrated into the narrative suggests a more significant purpose.

Mary's being called to spin provides a means by which her connection with the temple is sustained, perhaps even reestablished. It is unclear how much time passes between her departure and her being summoned with the other virgins. The commissioning of the veil *appears* to happen immediately, for the introduction of the council that gathers to discuss the matter is abrupt (Ἐγένετο δὲ συμβούλιον τῶν ἱερέων ...) (PJ 10:1).⁴⁸ But because she is sixteen years of age when she visits Elizabeth (PJ 12:9), either four years pass before the council commissions the veil or it takes her four years to complete her work. Regardless of the exact timeline, the terse introduction serves to bring her back into proximity with the temple quickly. By assigning the task of spinning to her, the high priest ensures that Mary's association with the temple will continue, even if she no longer lives there.⁴⁹

Mary's spinning also emphasizes that she remains παρθένος after she has left the temple. She is protected throughout her childhood from any sort of contamination: her mother purifies herself before breastfeeding her (PJ 5:9-10), and she lives in the bedroom-sanctuary where she is entertained by the "undefiled daughters of the Hebrews" (PJ 6:4-5). When her parents bring her to the temple, the path is lit so that her heart will not be taken captive (αἰχμαλωτίζεσθαι) by things outside of the temple (PJ 7:5). In the temple, she lives in

⁴⁸ Other events in PJ are accompanied by an indication of elapsed time. After Mary is born, she grows stronger "day by day." After six months, Anna places her on the ground to see if she can walk (PJ 6:1-2). A banquet is held to mark her turning one (PJ 6:6), and her parents discuss whether to bring her to the temple when she turns two (PJ 7:1). They bring her to the temple when she turns three (PJ 7:4), and she remains there until she is twelve (PJ 8:3).

⁴⁹ Citing Origen, *In Matth.* 25.2, in which Zechariah allows Mary to continue her adoration in the temple after Jesus is born, van Stempvoort argues that the seeking of a relationship between Mary and the temple is not unusual in this period ("Protevangelium Jacobi," 412).

the holy of holies, at the summit of purity. When Joseph takes her from the temple, it is the first time that she has been unguarded. He entrusts God with Mary's protection (PJ 9:12), but this does not change the fact that she is now outside a structure that guards her purity. Nothing implies that the priests are aware of Joseph's leaving her alone, so when the high priest gathers the virgins to spin thread for the veil he does not hesitate to call her as well (PJ 10:4). Her being chosen by lot to spin not one but two types of thread illustrates that Mary, even in her absence from the temple, is still *παρθένος*.

4.3.2. Annunciation

Mary hears a voice greeting and praising her as she is outside of her house drawing water (PJ 11:1-2).⁵⁰ When she cannot discern its source, she becomes frightened and returns home. She puts down her pitcher, takes up the purple thread, sits down and begins to draw it out (*ἐλκεῖν*) (PJ 11:4). An angel appears to her and says, "Do not fear, Mary. For you have found favor in the presence of the ruler (*δεσπότου*) of all. You will become pregnant (*συλλήψει*) by means of his word (*ἐκ λόγου αὐτοῦ*)" (PJ 11:5). She expresses doubt, not as to whether she will *become pregnant*, but as to whether she will *give birth* as all women do. Her response acknowledges the content of the angel's message as a possibility (PJ 11:6).⁵¹ The angel says that the birth of her child will not be typical, because the power of God will overshadow (*ἐπισκιάζειν*) her (PJ 11:7). She is instructed to name her child Jesus, "for he will

⁵⁰ This scene may appear on the walls of the third-century house church at Dura-Europos (so Dominic E. Serra, "The Baptistery at Dura-Europos: The Wall Paintings in the Context of Syrian Baptismal Theology," *EL* 120 [2006]: 77-78; Michael Peppard, "Illuminating the Dura-Europos Baptistery: Comparanda for the Female Figures," *J ECS* 20 [2012]: 543-74).

⁵¹ So Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 152.

save his people from their sins” (PJ 11:8), and she then consents to the angel’s message (PJ 11:9).

Alter notes that “the encounter with the future betrothed at a well” is among the most common type-scenes in the OT (e.g., Gen 29:1-14; Exod 2:15-22). “What is really interesting,” he suggests, “is not the schema of convention, but what is done in each individual application of the schema to give it a sudden tilt of innovation or even to refashion it for the imaginative purposes at hand.”⁵² That Mary is on her way to draw water leads the reader to expect that she will meet someone, but her status as utterly *παρθένος*, not to mention her relationship with Joseph, indicates that this “betrothal” will be atypical. The angel’s greeting calls to mind the Lukan annunciation, and the initial words spoken to Mary are identical in both cases: “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you (*Χαῖρε, κεχαριτωμένη, ὁ κύριος μετὰ σοῦ*)” (PJ 11:2; Luke 1:28).⁵³ The annunciation narrative and the betrothal type-scene are disrupted when Mary leaves the well to resume spinning. This “sudden tilt of innovation” prefaces the second instance of the angelic voice.

Mary is holding her thread when the angel speaks again: “Having put down (*ἀναπαύσασα*) the pitcher, she picked up (*ἔλαβεν*) the purple thread” (PJ 11:4). Only after she begins to spin does she respond to the angel’s message: “Behold the handmaid (*δούλη*) of the Lord before him. May it be to me according to your word (*ῥῆμα*)” (PJ 11:9). While her spinning fosters her connection with the temple, indicating that she is *παρθένος* even in her

⁵² Alter, *Art*, 60-63.

⁵³ The angel follows the initial greeting in PJ with part of Elizabeth’s greeting in Luke: “Blessed are you among women (*εὐλογημένη σὺ ἐν γυναιξίν*)” (PJ 11:2; Luke 1:42).

absence from it, the fact that she spins while receiving the angel's message shows that she will remain παρθένος even in the act of conceiving a child.

But her spinning also has christological implications. As Conostas observes: “The spinning of the purple thread ... is an activity coincident with the moment of incarnation.”⁵⁴ By situating the annunciation in this context, the author of PJ forges a connection not only between Mary and the temple but between Jesus and the temple: Mary spins thread for the καταπέτασμα—that which separates the divine from the human—while acting as the vehicle for the λόγος—that which unites the divine with the human. Through her work, the author connects the veil with the child in her womb, forming a textual bridge between all three. The correlation is reinforced in the course of Mary's visits to the high priest and Elizabeth.

4.3.3. Elizabeth and the High Priest

Mary brings her thread to the high priest once she finishes spinning it, and he praises her: “Mary, the Lord God has magnified (ἐμεγάλυνεν) your name, and you will be blessed (εὐλογημένη) by all the generations of the earth” (PJ 12:2).⁵⁵ The exchange is mutual, for just as he receives (λαμβάνειν) her thread, she receives (λαμβάνειν) his praise with joy (χάρις) (PJ 12:2-3). She then visits Elizabeth, who also blesses her: “Why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, the baby inside me jumped and blessed you (τὸ ἐν ἐμοὶ ἐσκίρτησεν καὶ εὐλόγησέν σε)” (PJ 12:5).⁵⁶ Mary looks up to

⁵⁴ Conostas, *Proclus*, 326.

⁵⁵ Because the author has provided no details to the contrary, it is assumed that Samuel is continuing to serve as high priest in Zechariah's absence (PJ 10:9).

⁵⁶ That the author bothers neither to introduce Elizabeth nor to mention that she is pregnant implies that she needs no introduction: the reader knows who she is and that she is pregnant with

the sky and says, “Who am I, Lord, that all the generations of the earth should bless (μακαριοῦσιν) me?” (PJ 12:7). She stays with Elizabeth three months, becomes frightened as her belly begins to swell, and returns home to hide from the people of Israel (PJ 12:8).⁵⁷

The high priest and Elizabeth are narrative counterparts to one another, and both respond positively to Mary and the gifts she brings. The Virgin’s reaction to their blessings is different in each case: to the high priest she replies with joy; to Elizabeth, with confusion. Her words to Elizabeth are prefaced by a stark comment from the narrator: “Mary had forgotten (ἐπελάθετο) the mysteries that the angel Gabriel had spoken to her” (PJ 12:6). In this sense, her puzzlement is well founded. How could Elizabeth’s blessing make sense if Mary has forgotten that she is pregnant? Zervos’s concern (noted above) is that it is “obviously inappropriate” for one who has just been visited by an angel to simply forget the message given to her.⁵⁸ And while he is likely correct in identifying Mary’s forgetfulness as a literary suture, the end toward which it is applied is more complicated than an attempt to gloss her confusion.

John the Baptist.

⁵⁷ So Foscett: in contrast to the Lukan visitation, in PJ “the scene closes in tension rather than triumph” (*Virgin Conceived*, 152).

⁵⁸ And the narrator’s comment in PJ 12:6 “somewhat unsatisfactorily ascribes Mary’s befuddlement to the fact that she ‘had forgotten the mysteries which the angel Gabriel had spoken’ ” (“An Early Non-Canonical Annunciation Story,” 672-73). Amman proposes two possibilities to explain the oddity: first, that Mary had become so accustomed to hearing the voices of angels that Gabriel’s message made no impression; second, that it evidences her profound humility (*Protévangile*, 229). Also Foscett: her forgetfulness “underscore[s] the text’s focus on the *logos* by which Mary *conceives*. In contrast to Luke, no emphasis is placed on the *logos/rhema* that the virgin either utters or trusts.” This is in keeping with Foscett’s thesis that Mary “functions less as an active subject and more as an object of exchange and offering ... she is a passive character whose bodily integrity is of paramount concern” (*Virgin Conceived*, 153, 160).

Vuong suggests that “Mary’s memory lapse seems to be a narrative device used with the purpose to allow for further confirmation of her sexual purity.”⁵⁹ The questioning she endures is directly related to her inability to explain her condition, and her forgetfulness fuels her later self-defense before both Joseph and the court (PJ 13:10; 15:13).⁶⁰ And it lends credibility to her vow in both cases, at least from the reader’s perspective: the reader knows that she is truthful in saying she does not know what happened, because he or she is aware that Mary truly has forgotten the mysteries spoken to her by the angel.⁶¹ Her forgetfulness also conveys the author’s effort to represent faithfully the accounts of both Matthew and Luke: specifically, it brings the narrative into closer proximity with Matthew, for whom it is Joseph, not Mary, who knows the origin of the pregnancy (Matt 1:18-21).⁶²

The blessings of the high priest and Elizabeth demonstrate that Mary brings to each something that makes her worthy of praise: to the high priest she brings thread, but to both she brings a child. The pairing of blessings sets up a correspondence between the Virgin’s thread and what is in her womb. If the high priest blesses Mary for her thread, then his blessing is apt, for she has participated in the creation of an integral piece of the temple. If he blesses her *solely* for her thread, then his blessing is lavish. A tension is set by the fact

⁵⁹ Vuong, *Accessing*, 174.

⁶⁰ When Joseph returns home and finds her pregnant, Mary vows, “As the Lord my God lives, I do not know whence it came (οὐ γινώσκω πόθεν ἐστὶν ἐν ἐμοί)” (PJ 13:10). Later, when they are interrogated, Mary says to the high priest, “As the Lord God lives, I am clean (καθαρά) before him and have not known a man” (PJ 15:13).

⁶¹ So Foskett, *Virgin Conceived*, 154.

⁶² Similarly Catherine Playoust and Ellen Bradshaw Aitken: “This surprising forgetfulness serves the text’s harmonizing agenda, for it allows Joseph to receive his own dream-revelation, based on Matt. 1:20-23, without its content being preempted by Mary’s explanation” (“The Leaping Child: Imagining the Unborn in Early Christian Literature,” in *Imagining the Fetus: The Unborn in Myth, Religion, and Culture* [eds. Vanessa R. Sasson and Jane Marie Law; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009], 176).

that the high priest echoes the Lukan *Magnificat*, in which Mary herself offers praise for the work that God will accomplish through her (Luke 1:46-48). His blessing is therefore to be understood on two levels. On the one hand, he blesses her on account of her spinning; Mary herself seems to interpret his blessing in this way. On the other hand, his blessing also extends past her thread to the child in her womb. As Conostas notes, “when Mary devotedly spins the wool for the veil of the temple, the labor of her hands serves as a symbol for the labor of her womb.”⁶³

Elizabeth’s blessing restates the link between the Virgin’s thread and her child: Mary brings nothing *visible* to Elizabeth, and yet she and the *in utero* John the Baptist bless her. Elizabeth is working with scarlet thread when Mary arrives, which is problematic on two levels. First, she is married to Zechariah and is pregnant, and is thus not likely to have been called with the *virgins* who participate in spinning thread for the veil.⁶⁴ Second, even if she was assigned to spin thread for the veil, why would she have been given the same color as Mary?⁶⁵ But the author is careful to avoid portraying Elizabeth as engaged in precisely the same sort of work as Mary; he or she does not say *what* Elizabeth is doing with the thread,

⁶³ Conostas, *Proclus*, 330.

⁶⁴ So Amann, *Protévangile*, 227-28. I am assuming, of course, that Elizabeth’s conception of John the Baptist, unlike Mary’s conception of Jesus, took place in the usual manner.

⁶⁵ Hock addresses the inconsistency by arguing that the author here depicts Elizabeth, like Mary, as a woman “working virtuously at the loom.” The color of their threads is irrelevant. On the textual variants concerning *what* Elizabeth throws aside when Mary comes to her door: “These words [the scarlet thread] have the overwhelming support of the MSS and are preferred by both Tischendorf and de Strycker. They are nonetheless problematic, in that they seemingly place Elizabeth, who is married, among the virgins who were given the task of preparing the threads for the temple veil ... One copyist sensed the problem and proposed ‘what was in her hands’ instead” (*Infancy Gospels*, 53). But if the author’s goal is praise of Mary, then why would he or she be interested in also emphasizing Elizabeth’s virtue?

other than tossing it aside (ρίπτειν). Mary is the only character in PJ who is *explicitly* labeled as spinning (κλώθειν) anything.

That Elizabeth is depicted with thread *while pregnant* strengthens the correlation between a woman's thread and her unborn child. That both women work with scarlet thread indicates an affinity between their children: aside from being related to one another by virtue of their birth, both will die violent, perhaps even sacrificial deaths.⁶⁶ That Mary alone spins the purple, a color often associated with royalty, testifies to her superiority over the other spinning virgins and Elizabeth, as well as the superiority of her child to John the Baptist. Vuong argues in this regard that "Mary's allotment of the scarlet and purple threads signifies that she alone is chosen to be responsible for the royal segments of the veil; even among a group of other Davidic virgins, she emerges as the most royal."⁶⁷ While Elizabeth's working the scarlet thread is by no means central to this episode, it is a subtle indicator of the correspondence between Jesus and John as well as between Jesus and the thread spun by Mary.

4.4. The Reader and the Intertextual Canon

The description of the Virgin's work is consistent with accounts of spinning in antiquity, including the spinning of thread for the temple veil. But her work also emphasizes

⁶⁶ So Vuong: "Scarlet (κόκκινον) is often used in the Hebrew Bible and NT writings to refer to blood atonement and sacrifice and is regularly cited in association with cleansing and purification (e.g., Lev 14:4, 52; Num 19:6; Heb 9:19)." So also the association between virtuous woman and scarlet in Prov 31:21: "She is not afraid for her household when it snows, for all her household are clothed in crimson." The relationship is absent from LXX Proverbs: "Her husband has no concern for his household, when he spends time somewhere, for all that are hers are being clothed" (31:21) (*Accessing*, 145).

⁶⁷ Ibid.

her virtue and chosen status before God, and in providing the medium for the annunciation it sets up a correlation between Jesus on the one hand and the thread she spins on the other.

Three sources of intertextual resonance layer the significance of this material. First, the *Moirae* of Greco-Roman mythology cast Mary's spinning as metaphorical, as somehow participating in the forces that govern divine and human destiny. Second, the tradition of the *velum scissum*, the rending of the veil at the crucifixion, encourages the reader to see Mary's work as cooperative with the divine will. Finally, the Epistle to the Hebrews, which may be interpreted as conflating Jesus' flesh with the temple veil (Heb 10:20), defines the extent of the Virgin's power as it relates to the work accomplished by God through the crucifixion.

4.4.1. The *Moirae*

The verbs *νεῖν* and *κλώθειν* are often used in ancient literature to describe the actions of the *Moirae*, the goddesses of fate (*μοῖρα/αἵσα*) responsible for "spinning" the thread of destiny. Grimal observes that these goddesses have no real "legend" in the strict sense. Rather they operate as symbols of a "half-philosophical" and "half-religious" conception of the world.⁶⁸ Talk of the *Moirae* is present in both Jewish and Christian authors of the Common Era. Josephus (ca. 37-100 C.E.) is familiar with the broader concept of fate being "spun" (*J.W.* 6.49), and Athenagoras (ca. 133-190 C.E.) and Eusebius (ca. 263-339 C.E.) refer more explicitly to the *Moirae*, the former citing a tradition concerning their "birth" (*Leg.*

⁶⁸ Grimal, *Dictionnaire*, 300. So also Burkert, that the personification of the *Moirae* takes root in an earlier worldview that saw fate as a condition as opposed to an entity, and that eventually this belief in the ordering of the world is hypostatized (*Greek Religion*, 129, 174).

18.4), the latter referring to their traditional roles with respect to the thread they spin (*Praep. ev.* 3.11; 6.8).

I begin this section by introducing the concepts of fate and spinning in Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the earliest extant works to speak of fate as something that is "spun" by the gods and that determines the course of human lives. I then trace the post-Homeric evolution of the *Moirae*, focusing on the issue of their power in relation to human persons and other deities. I conclude by assessing their role in the works of Lucian, a rough contemporary of the author of PJ, who makes explicit a point only hinted at in earlier literature, that while the *Moirae* exercise a great deal of influence on divine and human fate, they are themselves subject to the fate/thread that they spin.

4.4.1.1. Fate and Spinning in Homer

The notion of life as being governed by fate (*μοῖρα/αἵσα*) is found first in Homer.⁶⁹ He is significant for the development of the *Moirae* as he is also the first to speak of fate as something that is "spun" by the gods. William Chase Greene argues that for Homer,

⁶⁹ In the *Odyssey*, Zeus sends Hermes to Calypso to ensure a safe return for Odysseus. He says, "it is his fate (*μοῖρα*) to see his own people" (*Od.* 5.41-42 [Murray and Dimock, LCL]). Hermes delivers the message: "It is not his fate (*αἵσα*) to perish here far from his friends, but it is still his lot (*μοῖρα*) to see his friends" (*Od.* 5.112-15 [Murray and Dimock, LCL]). In the *Iliad*, fate is almost universally linked with death. Menelaus says to the Trojan and Achaean armies: "for whichever of us death and fate (*μοῖρα*) are appointed, let him die; but you others be parted with all speed" (*Il.* 3.101-02 [Murray and Wyatt, LCL]). Near the end of the work, Agamemnon addresses Achilles: "and you for yourself also, godlike Achilles, it is fate (*μοῖρα*) to die beneath the wall of the wealthy Trojans" (*Il.* 23.80-1 [Murray and Wyatt, LCL]). More instances of fate linked with death in the *Iliad*: 4.517; 5.83; 7.52-3; 9.317-20; 15.117-18; 16.333-34, 433-34, 707-08; 17.421-22, 478, 672; 18.117-21; 20.476-77; 21.109-10; 22.436; 24.131-32, 224-25. B. C. Dietrich comments: "The *Iliad* is an epic of war, in which therefore death plays a much more important part than it would be expected to do in the *Odyssey*, which treats of an entirely different theme" (*Death, Fate and the Gods: The Development of a Religious Idea in Greek Popular Belief and in Homer* [ULCS; London: Athlone, 1965], 194).

“frequently Fate and gods seem to be interchangeable in their functions ... if Fate spins men’s lots so also do the gods.”⁷⁰ Near the end of the *Iliad*, Priam says to Achilles, “for so have the gods spun (ἐπεκλώσαντο) the thread for wretched mortals, that they should live among sorrows” (*Il.* 24.525-26 [Murray and Wyatt, LCL]). At the start of the *Odyssey*, the narrator speaks of Calypso’s failed attempts to keep Odysseus in captivity: “But when, as the seasons revolved, the year came in which the gods had spun (ἐπεκλώσαντο) that he should return home to Ithaca ...” (*Od.* 1.17 [Murray and Dimock, LCL]). Later, Telemachus expresses sadness at his inability to take vengeance on the suitors who plague his father’s house: “But no such happiness have the gods spun (ἐπέκλωσαν) for me, for me or for my father; and now I must simply endure” (*Od.* 3.208-10 [Murray and Dimock, LCL]).⁷¹

A subtle example of the relationship between spinning and fate is the character of Penelope, who spins a burial shroud for Odysseus’s elderly father, Laertes. In the wake of Odysseus’s alleged death, suitors plague his house to vie for her hand in marriage. She addresses them thus: “Young men, my suitors, since noble Odysseus is dead, be patient, though eager for my marriage, until I finish this robe—I would not have my spinning (νήματα) come to naught—a shroud for the hero Laertes, against the time when the cruel fate (μοῖρα) of pitiless death shall strike him down” (*Od.* 2.96-100 [Murray and Dimock, LCL]).⁷² The genius of her plan, of course, is that she unravels each night what she spun during the day. Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass note that “the *appearance* of

⁷⁰ Greene, *Moirai: Fate, Good, and Evil in Greek Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1944), 15.

⁷¹ Other instances of the gods spinning fate in *Od.* 4.206-8; 8.579; 11.139; 16.64; 20.194-96.

⁷² The scene is repeated twice more with minor variations (19.141-45; 24.131-35).

industry is what Penelope aims for and what guarantees her chastity for three years before her subterfuge is discovered.”⁷³

Penelope’s procrastination can certainly be taken literally: she spins and “unspins” in order to avoid remarriage, and in this sense her work serves to keep Odysseus’s memory alive and to preserve her marital fidelity. A more nuanced interpretation is that her perpetual spinning and unraveling is in some way keeping both Odysseus and his father alive. Laertes is, after all, quite elderly when Odysseus goes missing, but he is still alive when his son returns two decades later. In the context of the other references to spinning in the Homeric epics, this reading is not outside the bounds of possibility.

Homer sometimes depicts *μοῖρα* as a pseudo-entity rather than simply as a natural ordering to the world. In the *Iliad*, it rouses Tlepolemus against Sarpedon (*Il.* 5.628-629), is blamed alongside the son of Leto for killing Patroclus (*Il.* 16.849-854), and is depicted by Agamemnon as standing alongside Zeus and Erinys (*Il.* 19.86-87). *Μοῖρα* is also accused of delivering Lycaon to Achilles (*Il.* 21.82-83), seeking out and trapping Hector (*Il.* 22.5-6, 303), and Phoebus Apollo says that it is responsible for the bestowing of an enduring heart among persons (*Il.* 24.49).⁷⁴ In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus speaks of *μοῖρα* ensnaring (*Od.* 11.291-293), seizing (*Od.* 17.326-327), and destroying persons (*Od.* 22.413). These instances are not indicative of the full-fledged personification of *μοῖρα* seen in later works, but the seeds for such development are clearly present.

⁷³ Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (CSRLC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 110.

⁷⁴ More examples of personification in the *Iliad*: 5.613-14; 12.113-16; 13.602; 19.408.

4.4.1.2. The Power of the *Moirae*

Hesiod is the first to name the *Moirae* as three separate entities. In one place he writes that they are daughters of Zeus and Themis: “[Zeus] married bright Themis, who gave birth to ... the Destinies [*Μοίρας*], upon whom the counselor Zeus bestowed the greatest honor, Clotho and Lachesis and Atropos, who give to moral human beings both good and evil to have” (*Theog.* 901-905 [Most, LCL]).⁷⁵ Clotho, the one who spins the thread of life, takes her name from κλώθειν. Lachesis, “the lot caster,” is responsible for winding the thread, and Atropos, “the unturnable (ἀτροπεῖν),” is responsible for clipping it and bringing death. The particular activities of each differ among ancient authors, but they are consistently presented as complementary.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ *Moirae* as daughters of Zeus and Themis also in Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibl.* 1.3. Earlier in the *Theogony* (211-19), Hesiod claims that they are daughters of Nux. So also Aeschylus (ca. 524-455 B.C.E.), from the perspective of the Erinyes (daughters of Nux): “O divine *Moirae*, sisters of our mother, givers of justice” (*Eum.* 961). Additionally, *Orphic Hymn* 59 is addressed to “Boundless *Moirae*, beloved children of dark Nux (*Μοῖραι ἀπειρέσιοι, Νυκτὸς φίλα τέκνα μελαίνης*).” Dating of the Orphic Hymns is debated. Arguments for a second-century date in Michael Lattke, *Hymnus: Materialien zu einer Geschichte der antiken Hymnologie* (NTOA 19; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 43-44. Arguments for the second part of the third century in Apostolos N. Athanassakis, *The Orphic Hymns: Text, Translation and Notes* (SBLTT 12; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977), vii-viii. See also Larry J. Alderink, “Orphic Hymn 13: To Kronos,” in *Prayer from Alexander to Constantine: A Critical Anthology* (ed. Mark Christopher Kiley; New York: Routledge, 1997), 190-94. Plato asserts that they are daughters of Necessity (Ἀνάγκη) (*Resp.* 617c), Quintus Smyrnaeus (late-fourth cent. C.E.) that they are “daughters of holy Chaos (Χάους ἱεροῖο θυγατρὲς)” (*Fall of Troy* 3.755). Cicero (ca. 106-43 B.C.E.), speaking of the *Parcae*, the Latin equivalent of the *Moirae*: “the *Parcae*, the Daughters of Hesperus, the Dreams: all of these are fabled to be the children of Erebus and Night” (*Nat. d.* 3.17 [Rackham, LCL]).

⁷⁶ Plato orders the sisters and their respective tasks thus: “There were other three who sat round about at equal intervals, each one on her throne, the Fates (*Μοίρας*), daughters of Necessity, clad in white vestments with filleted heads, Lachesis, and Clotho, and Atropos ... and Clotho with the touch of her right hand helped to turn the outer circumference of the spindle, pausing from time to time. Atropos with her left hand in like manner helped to turn the inner circles, and Lachesis alternately with either hand lent a hand to each” (*Resp.* 617b-d [Shorey, LCL]). Additionally: “[Lachesis] sent with each ... the genius that he had chosen, and this divinity led the soul first to Clotho, under her hand and her turning of the spindle to ratify the destiny of his lot and choice; and after contact with her genius again led the soul to the spinning (νῆσιν) of Atropos to make the web of

The sisters are often portrayed as attending births, where they spin the destiny of the newly born. The image is already present to some extent in Homer. Aeneas speaks of Achilles in the *Iliad*: “Later he will suffer whatever Fate (Αἴσα) spun (ἐπένησε) for him with her thread at his birth when his mother bore him” (*Il.* 20.127-28 [Murray and Wyatt, LCL]). Later, Hecabe says concerning Hector, “In this way for him did restless Fate (Μοῖρα) spin (ἐπένησε) with her thread at his birth, when I myself bore him ...” (*Il.* 24.209-10 [Murray and Wyatt, LCL]). Lastly, in the *Odyssey*, King Alcinous declares that Odysseus, after he returns home, “shall suffer whatever Fate (Αἴσα) and the dread spinners (κλωθεες) spun (νήσαντο) with their thread for him at his birth, when his mother bore him” (*Od.* 7.196-98 [Murray and Dimock, LCL]).

The image continues to develop after Homer. Callimachus recounts Athena’s words to Chariclo concerning the blinding of her son Teiresias: “O noble woman, the work cannot be taken back straightaway, since Moira spun (ἐπένησε) thread in this way when you first bore him” (*Hymn. Iav. Pall.* 103-05 [Mair, LCL]). In Lucian’s *Zeus Catechized*, the philosopher Cyniscus questions Zeus about the *Moirae*: “Tell me, then, is what [Homer and Hesiod] have sung about Destiny (Εἰμαρμένης) and the Fates (Μοιρῶν) true, that whatever they spin (ἐπινήσωσιν) for each of us at his birth is inevitable?” Zeus responds: “It is really quite true. There is nothing which the Fates (Μοῖραι) do not dispose (διατάττουσιν) ... nothing can come to pass outside the control of the Fates (Μοιρῶν), nor beyond the thread (λίνον) they spin” (*Jupp. conf.* 1-2 [Harmon, LCL]). Dietrich observes that “[they] do not actually assist at the moment of birth, but they are present as goddesses of fate; and in this

its destiny irreversible” (*Resp.* 620d-e [Shorey, LCL]).

capacity they, as it were, receive the new born child and become masters of his destiny until he dies.”⁷⁷

The *Moirae* also appear at the births of gods and goddesses. Pindar claims that they attended the birth of Iamus, son of Evadne, a daughter of Poseidon (*Ol.* 6.39-42), and Aeschylus likewise recounts the story of the birth of the *Erinyes*: “This is the lot that relentless *Moirai* spun (ἐπέκλωσεν) for us to hold firmly ... this lot (λάχῃ) was ordained us at our birth” (*Eum.* 334-349). The birth of Artemis as told by Callimachus is similar: “I [Artemis] will visit only when women vexed by the sharp pangs of childbirth call me to their aid—even in the hour when I was born the Fates (Μοῖραι) ordained (ἐπεκλήρωσαν) that I should be their helper” (*Hymn. Dian.* 3.22 [Mair, LCL]).

The question of their power in relation to the gods elicits a variety of answers. Hesiod seems to suggest that Zeus, the one who bestows upon the *Moirae* their authority, is simultaneously exempt from it (*Theog.* 901). The matter is stated more firmly by Pausanias in his description of the Temple of Zeus at Megara: “Above the head of Zeus are the *Horae* [Seasons] and the *Moirae*. It is clear to all that destiny (πεπρωμένην) is obedient to him alone” (*Descr.* 1.40.4). Later, in his account of another temple at Olympia, he refers to an epithet of Zeus: “There is an altar, and written on it is *Moiragetes* (Μοιραγέτα). Clearly, this is a title for Zeus, who knows the things of humans, what ever the *Moirae* give and what ever is not destined (πέπρωται) for them” (*Descr.* 5.15.5).⁷⁸ Translated as “Guide of the

⁷⁷ Dietrich, *Death, Fate and the Gods*, 79. So also Greene: the notion of one’s fate being spun at birth “is a more vivid way of asserting the determining influence of heredity, though it links each individual directly with Fate, rather than with his forebears” (*Moirai*, 16).

⁷⁸ Also in Pausanias, *Descr.* 8.37.1. Elsewhere he recalls the same title as having been given to Apollo (*Descr.* 10.24.4). See also Alciphron (ca. 170-350 C.E.), *Ep.* 3.37.2.

Moirae,” the title shows that their power, while vast, is thought by some to be at least somewhat limited.

Their presence at the births of at least some of the gods in the pantheon implies that they exercise a degree of authority over their respective fates. Aeschylus pens an exchange that illustrates the point: “Chorus: Who therefore is the rule of necessity (ἀνάγκης)? Prometheus: The three-form *Moirae* and mindful *Erinyes*. Chorus: Is Zeus therefore weaker than them? Prometheus: Certainly he will not escape what is predestined (πεπρωμένην)!” (*Prom.* 515). Philostratus also writes of Zeus’s limited power: “After Minos the brother of Sarpedon had died, [Zeus] gave him a golden scepter and appointed him judge in the court of Hades, but he was unable to exempt him from the *Moirae*” (*Vit. Apoll.* 8.7.767-770).⁷⁹ One theme common to all who address the issue is that *human persons* are never exempt from their grasp: since all must die eventually, all are under the authority of the *Moirae*.⁸⁰

In the works of Lucian, all human action results from the spinning of the *Moirae*. Hermes remarks to Charon in *The Inspectors*, “I recently heard Clotho reading what had been spun (ἐπιτεκλωσμένα) to each person” (*Char.* 13), and a bit later, “look closely and you will see the *Moirae* above, spinning (ἐπιτεκλωθούσας) to each from the spindle from which all things that have come to pass hang from fine threads (νημάτων)” (*Char.* 16). He then asks Charon if he sees “spider webs (ἀράχνια) coming down to each from the spindles (ἀτεράκτων).” Charon responds that he sees each person attached to a fine thread that is

⁷⁹ Ovid (43 B.C.E. – 17 C.E.) writes similarly of Venus’s anxiety over the assassination of Julius Caesar: “[She] voiced her fears throughout the heavens, but in vain, troubling the gods, who though they could not break the iron rules of the ancient sisters, nevertheless gave no uncertain omens of imminent disaster” (*Metam.* 15.779-780). See also Quintus Smyrnaeus, *Fall of Troy* 13.545; 14.96; Nonnus, *Dionysiaca* 8.351.

⁸⁰ So Burkert: “For man, the most important and painful boundary is death: this is his limited portion” (*Greek Religion*, 129-30).

entangled with many others (*Char.* 16). Hermes explains that the entangling is an indication that it has been fated (εἵμαρται) for certain persons to affect the destinies of others, whether for good or ill (*Char.* 16).

Lucian depicts the *Moirae* as either equal to or surpassing the gods in their ability to determine destiny. In *The Downward Journey*, Clotho questions Charon about the paucity of persons in his boat. He blames Hermes and reminds Clotho that he is subject to both of them. Clotho responds that they share authority with Zeus (*Cat.* 2). In *Zeus Catechized*, Cyniscus asks if all gods are bound like humans to the thread of the *Moirae*. Zeus responds that they are, at which point the philosopher speaks of Zeus as hanging from Clotho's spindle as a fish hangs from a fisherman's rod (*Jupp. conf.* 4). He asks Zeus if he is able to unspin (ἀνακλώθειν) the decrees of the *Moirae*, and Zeus responds that he is not (*Jupp. conf.* 7). It would seem as if no person or force is more powerful than the beings who spin the thread of destiny. Even the gods are subject to the thread spun by the *Moirae*.

With respect to the “unspinning” of human fate, Clotho speaks to Hermes in *The Downward Journey* about a soul who attempted to escape while *en route* to Charon's boat: “The fool was fleeing, as if able to live longer, when already the thread spun (ἐπικεκλωσμένου) for him had run out (ἐπιλελοιπότος)” (*Cat.* 2). She speaks later with Cyniscus, who tells her that he had been expecting to die for some time: “For you almost spun (ἐπέκλωσας) your whole spindle (ἄτρακτον) for me.” He even admits to trying to end his own life (lit., “to cut his thread [τὸ νῆμα ... ἐλθεῖν]”), but he says that he was unable to (*Cat.* 7).⁸¹ In one of the *Dialogues of the Dead*, Sostratus asks Minos if his actions in life were of

⁸¹ Elsewhere in Lucian, Terpsion opines to Pluto that an old man no longer able to enjoy his wealth should depart from life so that he can make way for younger men (νέοις). Pluto answers that this is impossible, as both Fate (Μοῖρα) and Nature (φύσις) have ordered (διέταξιν) things otherwise

his own willing (ἐκῶν) or whether they were already spun (ἑπεκέκλωστο) to him by Fate (Μοίρας). Minos answers that it is the latter (Ὑπο τῆς Μοίρας δηλαδή) (*Dial. mort.* 24.451). Sostratus responds that it is unjust that he, a servant of what Clotho has commanded, should be punished. Minos responds by asking Hermes to stop his punishment on the condition that Sostratus not teach the other dead to ask such questions.⁸²

The power of the *Moirae* in Lucian is vast but not unlimited, for the Spinners themselves seem impotent to change the destiny they spin for others; once their thread has been spun, its length determined, it would seem as if *none* is able to make it longer or shorter. Cyniscus, in *Zeus Catechized*, remarks to Zeus that “even Atropos would not tolerate it if someone turned back the spindle (ἄτρακτον), undoing the work of Clotho” (*Jupp. conf.* 11). And Lucian opines similarly in his *How to Write History*: “I imagine, the things that have been done, not even Clotho can unspin (ἀνακλώσειεν) nor Atropos turn [them] back” (*Hist. Conscr.* 38). Lucian therefore presents the power of the *Moirae* as a paradox: they exercise a great deal of authority in determining the fate of others, but even they are bound by the fate they spin.

4.4.1.3. Mary and the *Moirae*

The Virgin’s work takes on a new shape against the backdrop of the *Moirae*: in addition to the spinning of physical thread that she accomplishes with her hands, she spins in her womb a thread that is the fate of its object, who in this case is Jesus. But in contrast to

(*Dial. mort.* 16.347).

⁸² Minos does *not* in this instance undo the work of Fate as it applies to Sostratus. The latter remains dead, which is insinuated by the command not to teach the other dead (τοὺς ἄλλους νεκρούς) to question in this way (*Dial. mort.* 24.454).

the more common portraits of the *Moirae*, where they exercise authority even over the gods, Mary's authority is limited and governed by the God of whom she declares herself a servant (δοῦλος) (PJ 11:9). The notion that her spinning is itself determined by a fate she does not control is present elsewhere in the narrative: when the high priest calls her to the temple to spin, she and the other virgins cast lots (λαγχάνειν) in order to dictate their respective thread assignments (PJ 10:7-8). The casting of lots is no arbitrary means of decision-making; rather, it is a medium through which the divine will is discerned.⁸³ Mary's role is thus one of power, but not unqualified; even the *Moirae* are in some way bound and governed by the thread they spin.

The connection between Mary and the *Moirae* has been suggested, but it has at times been argued on the basis of art and iconography, often to the exclusion of PJ. What is more, its theological significance is often difficult to perceive. Florentina Badalanova Geller, for example, suggests that Mary's spinning takes root in popular lore that predates PJ and, almost parenthetically, that "this folklore imagery correlates with the classical Greek and Roman mythopoeic representation of the three goddesses of fate who were spinners and/or weavers."⁸⁴ Similarly, in her analysis of medieval Marian art and texts Gale McMurray Gibson contends that images of Mary spinning are "influenced by the well-known classical composition of the three spinning sisters personifying man's destiny." Curiously, she traces the origin of Mary's work to *Ps.-Mt.* She acknowledges the dependence of *Ps.-Mt.* on PJ, but

⁸³ In Acts, for example, the disciples pray concerning Judas's replacement. They then cast lots in order to make evident what God has decreed (Acts 1:24-26). So also Lev 16:8-10; Num 26:55-56; 33:54; 34:13; 36:2; Josh 14:2; 15:1; 18:6-19:40; 21:4-10; 1 Sam 14:41-42; 1 Chr 6:54, 61, 65; 24:5, 7, 31; 25:8-9, 13; Neh 10:34; 11:1; Jonah 1:7; Luke 1:9.

⁸⁴ Geller, "The Spinning Mary: Towards the Iconology of the Annunciation," *Cosmos* 20 (2004): 231.

apart from a brief mention of the latter, her attention is focused on the former as the source of this Marian image.⁸⁵

In a more recent study, Markos Giannoulis examines the influence of *Moirae* iconography on later Byzantine art. In a description of a fifth-century mosaic of the birth of Jesus in the *Basilica Papale di Santa Maria Maggiore* in Rome, he suggests that the female figure (not Mary) situated to Jesus' left echoes the notion that the *Moirae* are present at the births of various gods.⁸⁶ This and every depiction of the *Moirae* "motif" alongside Jesus aims to prove his divinity, specifically, that he was divine from the moment of his birth: if he were *not*, then the *Moirae* would not be there.⁸⁷ The thesis is intriguing, but the preceding survey reveals that the *Moirae* are present at the births of gods as well as human persons.

Giannoulis discusses Mary's spinning at the annunciation and poses a simple question: "Is it any coincidence that just at the moment of the annunciation, Mary is spinning purple wool?" Ultimately it is not. The juxtaposition of spinning and annunciation suggests that the veil and the earthly life of Jesus begin at the same moment. It is likewise significant that the two things "spun" by Mary, the veil and the body of Jesus, are simultaneously "torn" at the time of Jesus' death. In keeping with his interpretation of the presence of the *Moirae* in Christian iconography of the birth of Jesus, Giannoulis interprets

⁸⁵ Gibson, "The Thread of Life in the Hand of the Virgin," in *Equally in God's Image: Women in the Middle Ages* (eds. Bolton Julia Holloway et al.; New York: Peter Lang, 1990), 46-49.

⁸⁶ The figure in this particular mosaic does not hold a distaff, an element common in iconography depicting the *Moirae* (Giannoulis acknowledges as much).

⁸⁷ Giannoulis, *Die Moiren: Tradition und Wandel des Motivs der Schicksalsgöttinnen in der antiken und byzantinischen Kunst* (JACE; Ergänzungsband; Kleine Reihe 6; Münster: Aschendorff, 2010), 122-25.

these two threads as indicative of Jesus' divinity.⁸⁸ It is unclear, however, how this is reflected in the simultaneous tearing of these two threads. I address this question more fully in the following section.

4.4.2. The *velum scissum*

Three of the six references to the temple veil (*καταπέτασμα*) in the NT are references to its tearing at the crucifixion, an event commonly called the *velum scissum* (Matt 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45).⁸⁹ Giannoulis is not the first to suggest that the spinning material in PJ echoes this tradition. Foster argues that the story “appears to be told to allow readers the potential to recognize the intertextual link with the rending of the Temple veil in the passion narrative, now armed with the startling piece of knowledge that the mother of Jesus actually helped make the same veil.”⁹⁰ Hock also makes this connection, suggesting that Mary's spinning foreshadows “the ironic coincidence that the very veil she had helped to make was split in two at Jesus' death.”⁹¹ Whereas for Foster this seems to be the episode's *raison d'être*, for Hock it is peripheral to its *encomiastic* function. The brevity of their comments allows for further exploration of the significance of this connection.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 141-143, 154.

⁸⁹ The other three, in Hebrews (6:19; 9:3; 10:20), are addressed below. The *καταπέτασμα* in the NT always refers to the veil before the holy of holies, as the LXX translators consistently employ *καταπέτασμα* as the “default” translation of פֶּרֶכֶת, which always refers to the inner veil (so Exod 26:31, 33, 35; 27:21; 30:6; 35:12; 36:35; 38:27; 39:34; 40:3, 21–22, 26; Lev 4:6, 17; 16:2, 12, 15; 21:23; 24:3; Num 4:5; 18:7; 2 Chr 3:14). And the Synoptic evangelists all employ a locative genitive (*καταπέτασμα τοῦ ναοῦ*) to identify the veil that tears as the inner veil. When *καταπέτασμα* refers to another veil in the LXX, it is always accompanied by a qualifier indicating the veil the text refers to (e.g., LXX Exod 37:5) (So Gurtner, “LXX Syntax,” 344-53).

⁹⁰ Foster, “Protevangelium,” 578.

⁹¹ Hock, *Infancy Gospels*, 16.

4.4.2.1. Mark and Matthew

Craig A. Evans contends that the *velum scissum* in Mark 15:38 prefigures the temple's destruction, that it results from Jesus' "sudden expiration" that occurs subsequent to his death, and that the force of this breath "actually tears the temple veil."⁹² Adela Yarbro Collins calls this hypothesis "bizarre," and she posits instead that the tearing of the veil in Mark is a theophanic moment anticipated by Jesus' baptism in Mark 1:10.⁹³

The pairing of the *velum scissum* with the baptism in Mark has been argued for extensively, David Ulansey referring to the pair as "Mark's cosmic inclusio." He acknowledges that others have preceded him, most notably Stephen Motyer, who observes what he considers to be several elements common to both scenes. These include a voice proclaiming Jesus to be the Son of God, which comes from heaven at the baptism (Mark 1:11) and from the centurion at the cross (Mark 15:39), and the language of descent: the Spirit descends (*καταβαίνειν*) upon Jesus at the baptism (Mark 1:10), and when the veil tears, it does so in a downward motion (*ἀπ' ἄνωθεν ἕως κάτω*) (Mark 15:38).⁹⁴

⁹² Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20* (WBC 34B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 509. So also Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 949-50. On the other hand, Gurtner claims that "there is, quite simply, no documented evidence that establishes the association between a rent veil and the destruction of the temple" (*The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus* [SNTSMS 139; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007], 11).

⁹³ Collins, *Mark: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 763.

⁹⁴ On the affirmation of Jesus as Son of God, Gurtner observes that the readers of Mark "have been waiting throughout the entire Gospel for a human acknowledgment of this title for Jesus" ("The Rending of the Veil and Markan Christology: 'Unveiling' the ὁ ὢν [Mark 15:38-39]," *BibInt* 15 [2007]: 306). Additionally, both scenes involve Elijah to some degree. At the baptism, John the Baptist is portrayed as an Elijah-like figure, and while he is on the cross, Jesus is mistakenly heard as crying out to Elijah (Mark 15:35). Both scenes also involve a degree of Spirit language. This is most obvious at the baptism, when the Spirit descends on Jesus as he emerges from the water. Similarly, Mark's way of describing Jesus' final breath on the cross — *ἐκπνέειν* (derived from *ἐκ πνέειν*) — evokes the

Ulansey bolsters Motyer's arguments with evidence from Josephus, noting his description of the *outer* veil as a tapestry embroidered with celestial imagery: "Portrayed on this tapestry was a panorama of the entire heavens" (*J. W.* 5.212). In light of this description, he argues that "any of [Mark's] readers who had ever seen the temple or heard it described would instantly have seen in their mind's eye an image of *the heavens being torn* and would immediately have been reminded of Mark's earlier description of the heavens being torn at the baptism."⁹⁵

Matthew, like Mark, places the tearing of the veil directly after the death of Jesus (Matt 27:51), and he employs the episode toward similar ends. On the one hand, he loses the verbal parallel between the tearing of the veil and the baptism of Jesus; at the Matthean baptism the heavens are merely *opened* (*ἀνοίγειν*) rather than *torn apart* (*σχίζειν*) (Matt 3:16; Mark 1:10). But he follows Mark in portraying the *velum scissum* as a theophany; those present at the crucifixion profess Jesus to be Son of God after he dies (Matt 27:54). Luz argues that for Matthew the event signifies the future destruction of the temple and the end of the sacrificial cult, and that the passive *ἐσχίσθη* indicates that the tearing is a divine

imagery of the Spirit at the baptism (Motyer, "The Rending of the Veil: A Markan Pentecost?" *NTS* 33 [1987]: 155-57).

⁹⁵ Ulansey, "The Heavenly Veil Torn: Mark's Cosmic Inclusio," *JBL* 110 (1991): 125. Gurtner maintains that in Mark it is the *inner* veil that is torn ("Rending," 306). Joel Marcus considers the issue of *which* veil to be irrelevant. Either allows for the parallelism with Jesus' baptism in Mark 1:10. If Mark intended for the *καταπέτασμα* to be read as the outer veil, then the parallelism is established *vis-à-vis* the heavenly imagery on the outer veil. If he has in mind the inner veil, the parallelism remains: "At the baptism the dividing of the heavens allows something to emerge from behind them in a revelatory act, and this may be similar to what happens in 15:38-39 if the torn curtain is the inner one" (*Mark 8-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [AYB 27A; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009], 1057).

action, possibly a sorrowful one: “God himself mourns the death of Jesus by tearing the ‘garment’ of his house.”⁹⁶

In his extensive study of the Matthean *velum scissum*, Gurtner concludes that the significance of the veil’s tearing for Matthew is twofold: first, it is an apocalyptic event symbolizing the opening of heaven that frames the ensuing earthquake and resurrections (Matt 27:51-52) as signs of God’s sovereignty even in light of Jesus’ death; and second, that “the rending of the veil depicts the cessation of its function”: separation.⁹⁷ The episode thus inaugurates a new era wherein God is once again truly lives among humankind: “God’s presence now dwells among his people and permits a fellowship between man and God not seen since the Garden of Eden. For Matthew, Jesus is the true Israel and the people of God are defined by their relationship to Jesus.”⁹⁸

4.4.2.2. Luke

The Lukan *velum scissum* is distinct from Mark and Matthew in at least two ways: it is situated *before* the death of Jesus (Luke 23:45) and is coupled with a more positive view of

⁹⁶ Luz, *Matthew 21-28: A Commentary on Matthew 21-28* (Hermeneia; trans. James E. Crouch; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 566. So also Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28* (WBC 33b; Dallas: Word, 1993), 849. Hagner entertains the possibility that the tearing of the veil makes access to God more widely available, an interpretation promoted in recent years by Brown: “Now God’s presence in the heavenly sanctum is depicted as opened to all who follow Jesus through the veil” (*The Death of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Passion Narratives of the Four Gospels* [ABRL; 2 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1994], 2:1108).

⁹⁷ Gurtner, *Torn Veil*, 138. As an apocalyptic event, the tearing of the veil not only ushers in the eschatological era but also reveals Jesus’ true identity as God’s son: “The revelatory function of the torn veil in this pericope is congruent with Mark’s profession of faith by the centurion” (*ibid.*, 183).

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 198.

the temple.⁹⁹ The temple is integral to Luke's narrative, appearing at a number of key points. Near the beginning, Mary and Joseph act in accordance with the law and bring Jesus to the temple (Luke 2:27-28, 36-38), and after the resurrection the disciples are there "blessing God" (Luke 24:53).¹⁰⁰ Citing the replacement of Jesus' "inarticulate cry" in Mark with a prayer (Luke 23:46), Dennis D. Sylva argues that the rending of the veil in Luke is not a sign of the temple's demise but of Jesus' "communion with the God of the temple."¹⁰¹ Fitzmyer suggests that the veil's tearing in Luke signifies more broadly the possibility of intimate communion between God and persons: "Luke may well be suggesting in his own way what the Epistle to the Hebrews does more explicitly (9:6-28), that by the death of Jesus access to the intimate presence of God has been made possible for human beings, even those not serving in the priestly courses of old."¹⁰²

Green argues that the tearing of the veil in Luke is neither an indication of the destruction of the temple nor a sign of Jesus' communing with God. Instead, it is "of a piece with the larger Lukan emphasis on the obliteration of the barriers between those people previously divided by status and ethnicity."¹⁰³ But the temple is not the locale where this toppling of barriers occurs; Luke's Jesus is a reformer who addresses the ways that the

⁹⁹ So Green, "The Death of Jesus and the Rending of the Temple Veil (Luke 23:44-49): A Window into Luke's Understanding of Jesus and the Temple," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1991 Seminar Papers* (SBLSP 30; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 543.

¹⁰⁰ So Timothy Wardle: "It is clear that Luke has shaped his narrative in such a way as to emphasize the temple. It is unlikely, however, that Luke has invented out of whole cloth the idea that the early Jerusalem Christians frequented the temple" (*The Jerusalem Temple and Early Christian Identity* [WUNT 2.291; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010], 193).

¹⁰¹ Sylva, "The Temple Curtain and Jesus' Death in the Gospel of Luke," *JBL* 105 (1986): 250.

¹⁰² Fitzmyer, *Luke 10-24: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 28A; Garden City: Doubleday, 1985), 1514.

¹⁰³ Green, "Death of Jesus," 543.

temple is functioning, “as a sacred symbol of socio-religious power serving to legitimate the segregation of Jew and Gentile, priest and lay, male and female, and so on.” The veil’s destruction is thus understood as a sign that God has abandoned the temple as the location and means of reconciliation. So while Luke’s *velum scissum* does not allude to the demise of the temple, it does signify the termination of the “symbolic world surrounding and emanating from the temple.”¹⁰⁴

Each of the evangelists depicts the *velum scissum* in different terms and, in Luke’s case, at a different locations in the narrative. In Mark, it forms an *inclusio* with the baptism of Jesus, and at both points he is proclaimed to be the Son of God. As Gurtner has shown, Matthew employs the *velum scissum* toward an additional end: the inauguration of an eschatological era in which God again dwells intimately among people. For both Matthew and Mark, it also seems to be a symbolic destruction of the temple that precedes its physical destruction in 70 C.E., although this is far from certain. Luke’s relocation of the event to immediately *before* Jesus’ death constitutes a reworking of the tradition. His more positive view of the temple, coupled with his characteristic concern for the inclusion of the Gentiles, suggests that the tearing of the veil does not imply a destruction of the temple but a broadening of the missionary horizon of Jesus’ disciples.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Green, *Luke*, 824.

¹⁰⁵ Many modern interpretations of the *velum scissum* have roots in antiquity. Origen precedes the modern argument of Collins, writing that the tearing of the veil is indicative of Jesus’ divinity and is therefore theophanic (*Cels.* 2.33). The idea that the tearing of the veil is an act of mourning is already present in Melito of Sardis: “When the people did not tremble, the earth trembled; when the people did not fear, the heavens were afraid; when the people did not tear (περιεσχισμένον) [their clothes], the angel tore (περιεσχίσατο) [his]” (*Peri Pascha* 744-49). Gurtner’s thesis, that the tearing of the veil inaugurates a new era in God’s relationship with people, is anticipated by Cyril of Alexandria’s commentary on Joel 2:30-31, which speaks of the events that precede “the great day of the Lord.” In addition to being a sign of mourning, Cyril lists the rending of the veil as one of the signs that the day of the Lord has arrived with the death of Christ (*Os.-Mal.*

4.4.2.3. Cutting the Thread of Life

Regardless of its precise placement, the *velum scissum* is for Matthew, Mark, and Luke unmistakably linked with Jesus' death. The same is true for the apocryphal *Gospel of Peter*, wherein Jesus yells out before he dies, "my power, my power, you have abandoned me." After this he is "taken up (ἀνελήφθη)" and "at that time (αὐτῆς ὥρας) the veil (καταπέτασμα) of the Jerusalem temple split (διεράγη)" (*Gos. Pet.* 5.19-20).¹⁰⁶ According to De Jonge, the αὐτῆς ὥρας is equivalent to the καὶ ἰδοὺ of Matthew, and here it indicates a relationship between Jesus' last words and the rending of the veil.¹⁰⁷

The veil's tearing at the moment of Jesus' death confirms for the reader that the thread of life, symbolizing his own life span, has been cut. The Virgin's spinning thread for the veil that will be torn is therefore more than an "ironic coincidence" (Hock) or a "bitter irony" (Foster). It is rather a device that extends PJ's narrative by allowing for a continued relationship between Mary and her son, a relationship that endures even until his death.

But the *velum scissum* also defines the scope of Mary's power. The Virgin spins the thread of life, but she does not determine its length; the work of cutting the thread is

1.341.22). Marinus de Jonge comments: "Perhaps ... the scrutiny of the early Christian material will induce modern exegetes to review their own interpretations critically and to present them with utmost modesty. Many of them are not all that new, and all of them are tenuous" ("Matthew 27:51 in Early Christian Exegesis," *HTR* 79 [1986]: 79).

¹⁰⁶ Timothy P. Henderson observes that while the verb describing the veil's tearing in *Gos. Pet.* is different from that in the Synoptics, both retain the passive voice: "God is the agent through whom the rending of the veil takes place" (*The Gospel of Peter and Early Christian Apologetics: Rewriting the Story of Jesus' Death, Burial, and Resurrection* [WUNT 2.301; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011], 103).

¹⁰⁷ De Jonge, "Matthew 27:51," 73. Similarly Foster: the "chronological reference" in *Gos. Pet.* "makes explicit what is implicit in the Matthean and Markan accounts, namely, the contemporaneous events of the death of Jesus and the splitting of the curtain" (*The Gospel of Peter: Introduction, Critical Edition and Commentary* [TENTS 4; Leiden: Brill, 2010], 331).

ultimately completed by God, in whose hands the fate of Jesus finally rests. Mary's work is thus cooperative, not autonomous. While her being chosen by lot to spin specific types of thread verifies her subjection to the divine will, the tearing of her thread at her son's death is the ultimate check to her authority.

Mary's spinning nuances the Passion Narratives insofar it is her handiwork that is destroyed at the crucifixion. And the thread's being severed by God and not Mary establishes that her power is not absolute. This does not *lessen* Mary's role in the incarnation but *specifies* it; she continues to play an integral part in the process of redemption. Her γένειτό μοι at the annunciation and subsequent spinning in a sense inaugurates the process of the λόγος becoming flesh. That she spins thread for the veil that will be torn points toward the cross, where the angel's message to her is fulfilled: "He himself will save (αὐτὸς γὰρ σώσει) his people from their sins" (PJ 11:8; Matt 1:21). Matthew's αὐτὸς σώσει, here appropriated by the author of PJ, confirms that the salvation made possible through Mary's agreement is entirely a divine work.¹⁰⁸

4.4.3. The Epistle to the Hebrews

Hebrews is the only NT text apart from the Synoptics where καταπέτασμα occurs. In Heb 6:19-20, the author writes: "We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine (ἐσώτερον) behind the curtain (καταπετάσματος), where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered, having become a high priest (ἀρχιερέως) forever according to the order of Melchizedek." The reference to the inner shrine and to

¹⁰⁸ So Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 18.

Jesus having entered it as a high priest make the identity of this καταπέτασμα clear. “The curtain before the Throne of God,” according to William L. Lane, “is described in terms borrowed from the LXX, where τὸ ἐσώτερον τοῦ καταπετάσματος, ‘the inner sanctuary,’ signifies the inner curtain that separated the sanctuary of God from the holy place in the tabernacle.”¹⁰⁹ The matter is stated more explicitly in Heb 9:3: “Behind the second curtain (καταπέτασμα) was a tent called the Holy of Holies (Ἁγία Ἀγίων).”¹¹⁰

The third reference is more peculiar: “Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh) (διὰ τοῦ καταπετάσματος, τοῦτ’ ἔστιν τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ) ...” (Heb 10:19-20). The question is not whether the καταπέτασμα in this instance refers to the outer or inner veil. Instead, the issue is the parenthetical τοῦτ’ ἔστιν, and whether the author employs this phrase to correlate the veil with the flesh of Jesus. A survey of modern scholarship reveals that it is often interpreted as referencing the “way” opened by Jesus via his death, but the ambiguity of the phrase suggests that it may also be read as equating his flesh with the veil.

¹⁰⁹ Lane, *Hebrews 9-13* (WBC 47B; Dallas: Word, 1991), 154; also Harold W. Attridge: “This allusion prepares for the renewed references to Christ’s High Priesthood” that will appear later, but a “certain ambiguity affects the overall development of the motif,” due in part to the pluriform symbolism of the temple and the veil in antiquity (*The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* [Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989], 183-84).

¹¹⁰ So Attridge: the ambiguity of the first reference to the veil (6:19) is not present here. Rather, “the locale is fixed by the phrase ‘behind the second veil’ (μετὰ δὲ τὸ δεύτερον καταπέτασμα)” (ibid., 234). Also Lane: “The expression τὸ δεύτερον καταπέτασμα denotes the inner curtain that screened the rear sanctuary from the antechamber where the priests carried on their daily ministry” (*Hebrews 9-13*, 220).

4.4.3.1. The Flesh of Jesus and the Veil

Craig R. Koester argues on the basis of syntax and the parallel use of genitives (καταπετάσματος/σαρκός) for a relationship between “flesh” and “veil” in Heb 10:20, but the character of this relationship is one of agency rather than correspondence. Following Joachim Jeremias, he suggests that διὰ in Heb 10:20 should be read as an instrumental preposition governing both καταπέτασμα and σάρξ. Koester translates the passage thus: “through the curtain, that is, [by means of] his flesh.”¹¹¹ As the final sin offering, Jesus’ self-sacrifice is the means by which the space behind the veil is reallocated: it is no longer a sanctuary where only the high priest may commune with God but one into which *all* the faithful may follow the crucified Messiah. Attridge argues similarly that the entrance to the sanctuary is accomplished through the death of Jesus, and that the appositional “that is, his flesh” most likely refers to the “new and living way” and not to the veil.¹¹²

Myles M. Bourke proposes an alternative interpretation, arguing that Heb 10:20 conflates the veil and the flesh of Jesus: “Christ’s flesh is not the means of access to the sanctuary but, like the veil before the Holy of Holies, an obstacle to entrance.” He suggests, almost in passing, that “there may be a connection between this text and the rending of the Temple veil at the death of Christ.”¹¹³ But Bourke’s interpretation of Heb 10:20 is not new.

¹¹¹ Jeremias, “Hebräer 10:20: τοῦτ’ἔστιν τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ,” *ZNW* 62 (1971): 131; Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 36; Garden City: Doubleday, 2001), 443-44.

¹¹² Attridge, *Hebrews*, 285; Idem, “Hebrews,” in *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (eds. John Barton and John Muddiman; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1250. Also Lane: after the cross, “the community possesses a way that had not previously existed, which is the result of the definitive sacrifice of Christ” (*Hebrews 9-13*, 283).

¹¹³ Bourke, “The Epistle to the Hebrews,” in *NJBC* (eds. Raymond E. Brown et al.; Englewood

John Chrysostom, for example, states that “[the author] rightly called [Jesus’] flesh ‘a veil,’ for when it was affixed on high, then the things of heaven were revealed” (*ad Heb.*

63.139.52-54).¹¹⁴ Attridge himself acknowledges that τοῦτ’ ἔστιν in Heb 10:20 is syntactically ambiguous, so while in his view it refers to the “way” and not the “veil,” the converse may also be true.¹¹⁵ It may also be that such ambiguity opens the text to simultaneous interpretations.

4.4.3.2. Opening the *sanctum sanctorum*

If the veil is understood in terms of its traditional function, separating the divine from the human, then what is the consequence of understanding Jesus’ flesh as somehow synonymous with it? The tension is already set in PJ, where Mary spins thread for the veil while simultaneously acting as a vehicle for the incarnation of the λόγος: the veil conceals divinity from humanity, while the incarnation binds the two together. Similarly in Hebrews, the veil continues to serve as a barrier, albeit one that may now be breached by persons other than the high priest. But the divine presence continues to dwell behind the veil, and it is through (διὰ) this veil that the faithful must pass; the veil *continues* to guard the only

Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1990), 939. So also Morna D. Hooker, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (BNTC; London: A&C Black, 1991), 378. Cf. John Dunnill: to equate the veil with the flesh of Jesus in Hebrews “is to plunge Christian salvation back into the separative state of the old order” (*Covenant and Sacrifice in the Letter to the Hebrews* [SNTSMS 75; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992], 234).

¹¹⁴ Similarly Aquinas: “Just as the priest enters through the veil into the holy of holies, so if we want to enter the holies of glory we must enter through the flesh of Christ, which was the veil of his deity” (*Heb.* 502).

¹¹⁵ Attridge, “Hebrews,” 1250.

entrance into the holy of holies, and thus into communion with God. Paradoxically, then, the veil in both texts serves as an obstacle to and a medium for reconciliation.

The crucifixion resolves the tension. Jesus' death, according to the author of Hebrews, is the unequivocal means by which the holy of holies is opened and the faithful are permitted to enter. This is the case regardless of how one interprets the τοῦτ' ἔστιν of Heb 10:20. Jesus is the high priest who offers his own flesh as the final offering for sin, and it is this self-sacrificial action that "opens" the way through the veil. But identifying Jesus flesh with the veil provides a new angle from which to understand how his death "opens" the holy of holies: the sanctuary is quite literally "opened" when the obstruction at its entrance is torn in half.

Jesus' death may thus be read on two distinct yet related levels. On the one hand, it is the quintessential sin offering that serves to reapportion the space behind the veil: "After Christ's sacrifice no more sin offerings are needed ([Heb] 10:18), so that the inner chamber can be put to new use."¹¹⁶ On the other hand, the tearing of the veil, itself emblematic of his flesh, is a *literal* opening of the entryway into the holy of holies. And in this regard, the *velum scissum* again specifies the extent of the Virgin's power, for the final significance of the veil is not in its creation but in its destruction: the *tearing* the veil, rather than the *spinning* of it, is the deed that allows the faithful to enter the inner sanctum of God's presence.

¹¹⁶ Koester, *Hebrews*, 448.

4.5. Conclusion

The spinning Virgin serves an integral role in PJ; the thread she spins forms a threefold relationship between herself, the temple, and Jesus, and her spinning provides the context for the annunciation. What is more, the placement of this episode in the narrative sets up a correlation between her thread and the body of Jesus that is corroborated in the course of her visits to Elizabeth and the high priest. The reader layers this already rich imagery through exploration of the cultural encyclopedia. While references to spinning in other ancient literature indicate that Mary's spinning may be understood at face value, the image of the *Moirae* allows it to be read as a participation in the governing of human and divine fate. The Synoptic rending of the veil suggests to the reader that while Mary may spin the thread of life, she is not responsible for cutting it; this is the work of God. In this regard, her role in determining fate, while significant, is ultimately subordinate to the divine will.

CHAPTER 5 - THE CAVE AND THE CROSS (PJ 17-20)

Always the same hills
 Crowd the horizon,
 Remote witnesses
 Of the still scene.
 And in the foreground
 The tall Cross,
 Sombre, untenanted,
 Aches for the Body
 That is back in the cradle
 Of a maid's arms.

R. S. Thomas, *Pietà*

Mary gives birth to Jesus in a cave outside Bethlehem while she and Joseph are on their way to register in the census. She labors alone, without the aid of a midwife, and a dark cloud and bright light prevent those gathered from seeing what transpires. The examination she receives validates the incredible claim that her body shows no signs of having delivered a child, manifesting clearly the author's characteristic preoccupation with Mary's virginity/purity. The account is also christological, insofar as the events that accompany the birth affirm the miraculous nature of her son.

The reader layers the significance of this scene by considering the type of space that Jesus is born in, namely, a cave. In Greek and Roman literature, caves are often the birthplaces of gods and heroes. So the cave where Jesus is born may be understood as an indication of his divinity or future prestige. In the HB/LXX, by contrast, caves are places of scandal, havens for refugees, and tombs; they are not spaces that one would expect to encounter the divine presence. And in this respect, a cave is an undesirable space for the utterly pure Virgin to be, let alone to labor and give birth. The tension encourages the reader

to see Jesus' birth in light of the Passion Narratives, as a foreshadowing of his death and burial, and to visualize the cross event as the moment at which he is born as Israel's Messiah.

5.1. Introductory Matter

In 1865, the Englishman William Chatterton Dix penned verses that would inspire a revered Christmas hymn, "What Child is This?" The lyrics convey a peaceful scene of an infant guarded by shepherds and lulled to sleep on his mother's lap by angelic song. One of the hymn's more striking features is the introduction of violent language in the second verse, when a vision of the newborn's execution disrupts the otherwise tranquil image:

Why lies He in such mean estate
Where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christian fear: for sinners here
The silent Word is pleading.
Nails, spear shall pierce him through,
The Cross be borne for me, for you;
Hail, hail the Word Made Flesh,
The babe, the son of Mary!¹

The intermingling of Jesus' birth with his death is already present in Luke, when Simeon says to Mary, "this child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed ... and a sword will pierce your own soul too" (2:34-35). As Bovon notes, "the Messiah, now present, will be a suffering Messiah, and his mother will

¹ In some versions, the reference to the crucifixion is omitted. In the *United Methodist Hymnal* ([Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989], 219), for example, the refrain for all verses is identical: "This, this is Christ the King, whom shepherds guard and angels sing; haste, haste to bring him laud, the babe, the son of Mary."

partake of his sorrows.”² William S. Kurz observes similarly that, by means of Simeon’s words, Luke “has provided readers with all the information necessary for recognition of the ironic fulfillment of God’s plan, especially through Jesus’ death, that they will need to interpret the words and deeds of Jesus from the tradition.”³

Of the peculiar details that characterize PJ’s birth narrative, the cave (σπήλαιον) that Jesus is born in resonates with the canonical accounts of his interment. While the evangelists frame their reports with different terminology, each employing μνῆμα, not σπήλαιον, the implication for the reader is the same: Jesus’ earthly life begins and ends in a cave-like space. Gregory of Nyssa comments on this connection in a fourth-century homily on the nativity: “Regarding the cave (σπήλαιον) in which the master is born, perceive the dark and subterranean (ὑπόγειον) life of humanity into which is born the one who shines on those who were seated in darkness and the shadow of death. The one bound tightly in swaddling clothes is the one who puts on (περιβαλλόμενος) the binds of our own sins” (*Nativ.* [MPG] 1141.43).⁴ The mission of the Messiah, it would seem, is from its genesis a mission that demands his life.

² Bovon, *Luke 1*, 105.

³ Kurz, *Reading Luke-Acts: Dynamics of Biblical Narrative* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 47. Michael D. Goulder and M. L. Sanderson interpret Mary’s wrapping him in bands of cloth (σπαργανῶν) (Luke 2:7) as evocative of his burial (“St. Luke’s Genesis,” *JTS* n.s. 8 [1957]: 28). Brown contests this hypothesis on the grounds that the vocabulary of the burial is “entirely different” from the birth (*Birth*, 399).

⁴ So also Findlay: “The cave was a fit symbol of the dark world into which Jesus was born; there in the darkness shone the dazzling light which signaled the advent of the Saviour” (*Byways*, 164).

5.2. The Author and the Text

The canonical birth stories are remarkably terse in many respects. Matthew mentions the event in passing: “But [Joseph] had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus” (Matt 1:25). Luke is similarly brief: Mary and Joseph were in Bethlehem for the census, “and she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn” (Luke 2:7).

Details found in neither Matthew nor Luke permeate PJ’s account. Three in particular have commanded the attention of modern scholars: first, the location of Jesus’ birth as a cave outside of Bethlehem; second, the stilling of creation witnessed by Joseph and the abrupt introduction of first-person narration that accompanies it; and third, the character of Salome, an enigmatic woman who appears shortly after Jesus is born. Because these details figure prominently in the literary analysis, I address each of them here.

5.2.1. The Cave-Birth Tradition

Those familiar with what has become the paradigmatic image of the nativity may pause at the claim that Jesus was born in a cave (*σπήλαιον*): was it not a stable? But aside from the presence of a feeding trough (*φάτνη*), which would certainly support the notion that his birth occurs in an environment suitable for keeping animals, Luke (who is far more

detailed than Matthew) does not actually indicate *where* Jesus was born, aside from *in* Bethlehem and *not* in the *κατάλυμα*.⁵

The cave-birth tradition originates during the second century, but its source is undetermined. Outside of PJ, its earliest attestations are in the works of Justin Martyr and Origen (*Dial.* 78.5; *Cels.* 1.51.11-17).⁶ It is possible that both authors reveal familiarity with PJ. This is especially the case for Origen, who refers elsewhere to a “Book of James (βιβλίου Ἰακώβου)” as indicating that Joseph fathered children before he wed Mary (*Comm. Matt.* 10.17). With Justin the matter is less certain, in part because the date of his *Dialogue* is difficult to determine. His *First Apology* was likely written between 151 and 154 C.E., and the fact that Justin refers to this work in the *Dialogue* (120.5) gives the latter a *terminus post quem* of 155 C.E. and a *terminus ante quem* of 167 C.E. (the year of his death).⁷ While it is conceivable that PJ is the source of Justin’s knowledge of the cave, this would necessitate placing its composition at the earliest extreme of the proposed 150-200 C.E. spectrum.

Scholars have explored alleged correlations between PJ and Justin with varying results. De Strycker examines four in his 1961 edition, including the cave-birth, and he

⁵ Though commonly interpreted as “inn” or “guest house,” Stephen C. Carlson proposes translating *κατάλυμα* more generically as a “place to stay” (“The Accommodations of Joseph and Mary in Bethlehem: *Κατάλυμα* in Luke 2.7,” *NTS* 56 [2010]: 326-42). The *φάτνη* is likewise attested by the author of PJ, for whom it is a means to hide the infant in order to protect him from the slaughter of Herod (PJ 22:4).

⁶ Origen states that this detail is in conformity with (*ἀκόλουθος*) the account of Jesus’ birth in “the gospel.” The tradition is likewise present in Epiphanius, *Pan.* 51.9; Eusebius, *Dem. ev.* 3.2; 7.2; *Vit. Const.* 3.41, 43; Jerome, *Epist. [ad Paulin]* 58.3; 147.4; Philoxenus of Mabbug, *de Trin. et Incarn.* 3; Egeria, *Travels* 42; also Foster, on the itinerary of Antonius of Placentia: pilgrims reported visiting the (alleged) cave of Jesus’ birth as late as the sixth century (“Protevangelium,” 579). It is also worth mentioning that the sixth-century Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, commissioned by Constantine and later rebuilt by Justinian I, is situated atop a grotto.

⁷ So Craig D. Allert, *Revelation, Truth, Canon and Interpretation: Studies in Justin Martyr’s Dialogue with Trypho* (VCSup 64; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 32-34.

concludes that there exists no *literary* dependence between the two.⁸ He later revised this position, having been convinced by Jose Antonio de Aldama's work on the topic, and argued that the author of PJ was in fact familiar with the works of Justin.⁹ In either case, Justin's reference is considered the first of its kind in Christian literature.¹⁰ But Justin is unlikely to have invented the tradition, because he is aware of how easily it invites comparison between Jesus and the pagan deity Mithras (*Dial.* 70; 78) (discussed below). Revisiting the correlations examined by de Strycker, Zervos concludes that PJ was Justin's source for the cave-birth: "[Justin] derived his own parallel material from the already redacted text of PJ," and "we may now reestablish the works of [Justin] as the *terminus ad quem* for dating PJ." Its *terminus post quem*, moreover, "should be associated with ... the canonical gospels of Matthew and Luke."¹¹

These studies illustrate the complexity of this tradition. While it is conceivable that it originates with either Justin or PJ, it is equally tenable that both are simply drawing from popular lore. As Smid suggests, "mutual dependence can neither be proved nor denied. The most plausible suggestion is that they have taken it from a common source ... which can

⁸ The three other connections examined by de Strycker are as follows (I have conformed the verse numbers of PJ to match Hock's): first, in *1 Apol* 33.5 and PJ 11:7, the θεοῦ of Luke 1:35 is replaced with the ὑψίστου of Matt 1:21 (both read κληθήσεται υἱὸς ὑψίστου); second, in *1 Apol* 33.6 and PJ 11:5, both authors equate the λόγος with the πνεῦμα ἅγιον and δύναμις ὑψίστου of Luke 1:35; and third, both *Dial.* 78.5 and PJ 12:3 include the words χαρὰν λαβοῦσα. Connections cited in de Strycker, *Forme*, 414-16; Zervos, "Dating the *Protevangelium of James*," 419; Vuong, *Accessing*, 38.

⁹ De Aldama, "El Protoevangelio de Santiago y sus problemas," *Mar.* 12 (1962): 126-29; de Strycker, "Protévangle," 353.

¹⁰ So Massaux, *Influence*, 3:64.

¹¹ Zervos, "Dating the *Protevangelium of James*," 433-34.

neither be reconstructed nor described.”¹² Pending further evidence, the question of its origin remains an object of speculation.

5.2.2. Shift to First-Person Narration

Alongside the cave, the shift from third- to first-person narration in PJ 18 repays discussion. As noted in Chapter One, it is routinely cited as an indication of later editorial activity.¹³ More recent interpreters have sought to investigate this phenomenon within the final form of the narrative. Bovon understands it as validating the vision’s contents: “By switching over from ‘he’ to ‘I,’ the author forcefully induces the reader to accept the news and marvel at it.”¹⁴ And as Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan points out, “the narrative level to which the narrator belongs, the extent of his participation in the story, the degree of perceptibility of his role, and finally his reliability are crucial factors in the reader’s understanding of and attitude to the story.”¹⁵

Changes in narrative aspect are not uncommon in ancient literature. The well-known “we” passages in Acts are an obvious illustration. In Acts 16, the narrator recalls the start of

¹² Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi*, 126.

¹³ So Hilgenfeld, *Kritische Untersuchungen*, 154; Harnack, *Geschichte*, 598-603; Findlay, *Byways*, 150; Painter, *Just James*, 300. There are certainly other bases on which to argue that PJ 18 is later, including its absence from Papyrus Bodmer V.

¹⁴ Bovon, “The Suspension of Time in Chapter 18 of the *Protevangelium Jacobi*,” in *The Future of Early Christianity: Essays in Honor of Helmut Koester* (ed. Birger A. Pearson; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 401. Similarly Hock: it “seem[s] to have been a means for the author to enliven and authenticate the vision” (*Infancy Gospels*, 65). Bovon and Hock are preceded by Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi*, 177-78; B. A. van Groningen, *In the Grip of the Past: Essay on an Aspect of Greek Thought* (PA 6; Leiden: Brill, 1953), 36.

¹⁵ Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (NA; London: Routledge, 2002), 95.

Paul's journeys with Timothy: "They went (διήλθον) through the region of Phrygia and Galatia ... they attempted (ἐπείραζον) to go into Bithynia ... they went down (κατέβησαν) to Troas" (16:6-8). After describing Paul's vision in Troas (16:9), the narrator joins him and Timothy: "We immediately tried to cross (ἐξηγήσαμεν) over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us (ἡμᾶς) to proclaim the good news to them" (16:10). The first-person narration continues through 16:17, ending when Paul is arrested for exorcizing a pythonic spirit from the slave girl in Philippi (16:18-24). It starts and stops again three separate times before the end of Acts (20:5-16; 21:1-8; 27:1-28:16).

Martin Dibelius proposed what would become an influential understanding of the "we" passages, arguing that a pre-Lukan index (*Verszeichniss*) of Paul's journeys undergirds the travel narratives, and that Luke employs the first person in order to show when and where he himself was present. Noting a shift in style toward the end of Acts, he concludes that the index only includes those trips that precede Paul's arrival in Jerusalem (in Acts 21:17). Those that follow have as their form an ancient sea voyage, into which the author again introduces his own character at the proper points.¹⁶ Dibelius refers briefly to the narrative shift in PJ 18 and concludes that unlike the "we" passages, Joseph's "I" does not

¹⁶ Dibelius, "Style Criticism in the Acts of the Apostles" in *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles* (ed. Heinrich Greeven; trans. Mary Ling; London: SCM Press, 1956), 5. Similar arguments in Arthur Darby Nock, "The Book of Acts: Review of Dibelius, *Aufsätze zur Apostlegeschichte*," *Gn* 25 (1953): 500; Étienne Trocmé, *Le Livre des Actes et l'histoire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1957), 134-40; Hans Conzelmann, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Hermeneia; trans. James Limburg, A. Thomas Kraabel, and Donald H. Juel; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), xxxvi-xl; F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 7, 307-8. Vernon K. Robbins argues that the first person plural is a characteristic of ancient sea voyages in general ("By Land and By Sea: The We-Passages and Ancient Sea Voyages," in *Perspectives on Luke-Acts* [ed. C. H. Talbert; PRS 5; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1978], 215-42).

evidence a preexisting source but is rather “the author’s naïve attempt to make his text stand out.”¹⁷

Driven in part by the conviction that Luke was not a travel companion of Paul, subsequent interpreters have sought to move beyond Dibelius’s *Stilkritische* approach. Ernst Haenchen suggests that they serve to instill in the reader a sense of fellowship (*Gemeinschaft*) in the missionary endeavor.¹⁸ William Sanger Campbell argues similarly that the first-person narration “conveys a familiarity between narrator and reader that draws readers into the story, bonds them to the first-person plural company that includes the narrator, and encourages them to evaluate positively the narrator’s perspective and to accept the narrator’s version of events.”¹⁹ Richard I. Pervo articulates well this perspective: “‘We’ are those in need of salvation. At the narrative level, this is a mystery provoking and enticing the reader, while embracing all who hear or read the story, transforming it from a story about ‘them’ into a story about ‘us.’”²⁰

The shift that occurs at the start of PJ 18 is admittedly of a different sort than those in Acts. There is no “we”; there is only “I.” But the effect is similar: by reading the account of Joseph’s vision from his perspective, the reader finds him- or herself alone with the visionary, witnessing the events from his vantage point.

¹⁷ Dibelius, “Setting of the History of Early Christian Literature,” in idem, *Studies*, 203.

¹⁸ Haenchen, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (KEK; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968), 430; idem, “Das ‘Wir’ in der Apostelgeschichte und das Itinerar,” *ZTK* 58 (1961): 329-66.

¹⁹ Campbell, *The “We” Passages in the Acts of the Apostles: The Narrator as Narrative Character* (SBL SBL 14; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 90; also Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, vol. 2: *The Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 246-47.

²⁰ Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 392.

5.2.3. Salome

Finally, there is the question of Salome. Her character is enigmatic, her entrance into the narrative abrupt: she is not mentioned before the midwife finds her loitering about the cave entrance, and she disappears soon after she performs her examination of Mary. Along with Joseph and Elizabeth (PJ 9:1; 12:3), she receives no introduction; readers will presumably be able to identify her by drawing on their knowledge of other sources.²¹ While this may hold true for ancient readers, the same is not the case for later interpreters.²² The number of attempts to discern her identity reveals that our memory of her has faded; it is no longer clear *who* she was and *what* she was doing outside the cave where Jesus was born.

Smid understands Salome and the midwife together as the “two witnesses” spoken of in Deut 19:15 and Matt 18:17. Her name, he suggests, is either appropriated from Mark or is the product of the author’s fertile imagination.²³ According to Morton Smith she is none other than the eponymous disciple of Jesus who witnesses his crucifixion and accompanies the other women to the tomb (Mark 15:40; 16:1). Smith considers PJ to be part of an “orthodox polemic” to diminish her influence in the early church: she does not witness the birth of Jesus, and her first response to the news is doubt, for which she is punished.²⁴

Bauckham suggests that she is one of Joseph’s daughters (named in Epiphanius, *Pan.* 78.8.1;

²¹ So Bauckham, *Jude*, 40.

²² Even the author of *Ps.-Mt.* seems to have been confused by Salome; he or she designates her as a second midwife (13.4). In the *Armenian Gospel of the Infancy* she is waiting to confirm rumors about Mary that were circulating in Jerusalem (9.4).

²³ Smid, *Protevangelium Jacobi*, 139; also Painter, *Just James*, 303.

²⁴ Smith, *Clement*, 189-91.

78.9.6) who would have joined the family on their journey. This, he insists, is far more likely than the idea that one of Jesus' disciples would have been present at his birth.²⁵

Zervos sees Salome's character as a means of introducing Mary's postpartum virginity, which an editor accomplishes by appending the episode "to a discrete pre-existing account whose central figure was a Hebrew midwife."²⁶ Papyrus Bodmer V, in his view, exhibits characteristics that would support this theory. "Most conspicuous," he suggests, "is the healing of the midwife in 20.6," a healing that in the present form of the narrative is Salome's. He proposes two explanations to account for the discrepancy: first, "that the obviously dislocated 20.6 could represent an editorial attempt to identify Salome herself as the midwife"; and second, "that this dislocated verse indicates the midwife story originally ended with a transgression on her part that resulted in a punishment that required her own healing, as in the case of Salome."²⁷ He entertains (briefly) the suggestion that she is a daughter of Joseph, but he dismisses it as irrelevant.²⁸ Instead, the question of her identity is eclipsed by her function: she exists to confirm that Mary remains a virgin after the birth of Jesus.

²⁵ Baukham, "Salome the Sister of Jesus, Salome the Disciple of Jesus, and the Secret Gospel of Mark," *NovT* 33 (1991): 250. Cf. Benko on the possibility that the author here alludes to Dionysus's mother, Semele (*Virgin Goddess*, 201).

²⁶ Zervos, "Christmas with Salome," in *Feminist Companion to Mariology* (ed. Amy-Jill Levine; London: T&T Clark, 2005), 79.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 83; also Baukham, *Jude*, 41.

²⁸ Zervos, "Christmas," 88-89.

5.3. Literary Analysis of PJ 17-20

In contrast to Matthew and Luke, both of whom employ the verb *τίκτειν* to recount Mary's giving birth (Matt 1:25; Luke 2:7), PJ lacks any explicit reference to the birth itself: the infant merely appears (*φαίνειν*) to those gathered (PJ 19:16). Evidenced by the midwife's "a virgin has given birth (*παρθένος ἐγέννησεν*)" (PJ 19:18) and Salome's "he has been born (*οὗτος ἐγεννήθη*)" (PJ 20:10), the two *infer* that a birth has taken place, even though the Virgin's body cannot corroborate it. The author emphasizes, therefore, not only that the birth of Jesus is a mystery but that it does nothing to affect the virginity—and therefore the purity—of his mother.

The justification for dividing the material in this way is that all of the included episodes center on the birth of Jesus: Mary goes into labor in PJ 17, gives birth at some point in PJ 18-19, and receives a gynecological examination in PJ 20. In the episodes leading up to the birth, the focus is on determining whether Mary's pregnancy is the result of her or Joseph's sin (PJ 15-16). In what follows, Herod and the magi are central. While the magi do journey to the cave, Mary and Jesus are minor, passive characters: they do nothing other than be seen (PJ 21:11). And after the magi depart, Mary and Jesus disappear from the narrative, save for one reference to Mary placing him in a feeding trough to protect him from Herod's massacre of the infants (PJ 22:3-4).

5.3.1. The Journey *from* Bethlehem and the Suspension of Time

The episode begins with an imperial edict: "An order (*κέλευσις*) came from Emperor Augustus for all who are in Bethlehem of Judea (*ὅσοι εἰσὶν ἐν Βηθλεέμ τῆς Ἰουδαίας*) to be

registered (ἀπογράφεσθαι)” (PJ 17:1). By inaugurating the story in this way, the author calls to mind a corresponding scene in Luke: “In those days a decree (δόγμα) went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world (πᾶσαν τὴν οἰκουμένην) should be registered (ἀπογράφεσθαι)” (2:1). Because the author here exhibits a certain level of dependence on Luke’s Gospel, the number of points at which their narratives diverge is striking. In addition to the dialogue between Mary and Joseph, not to mention the recollection of Joseph’s own internal struggle at the start of the journey, one of the more obvious discrepancies is the *scope* of the census: in Luke it applies to “all the world,” but in PJ only those in Bethlehem are called to participate. While both authors stress Bethlehem or the territory *surrounding* Bethlehem as Jesus’ birthplace, each does so in a different way.

According to Luke, Joseph and Mary travel to “the city of David” because Joseph is a descendent of David (Luke 2:4). In PJ they are *already there*; the census would not apply to them otherwise. It is perhaps surprising that so many commentators have overlooked this detail. Most appear to conflate the two accounts and therefore miss the rather unsubtle thrust of the ὅσοι εἰσὶν ἐν Βηθλὲμ (“all who are [currently] in Bethlehem”) (PJ 17:1).²⁹ The family’s precise destination is therefore uncertain, a matter of speculation, but it is simultaneously irrelevant.³⁰ The point is that they are unable to get far before Mary begins to

²⁹ De Strycker labels this episode “road to Bethlehem (*en route pour Bethléem*)” (*Forme*, 143-45), and Hock refers to “the trip to Bethlehem” (*Infancy Gospels*, 61). Also Brown: “Mary and Joseph came near the third milestone on the journey to Bethlehem” (*Birth*, 401). Vuong acknowledges that Augustus’s census applies to “all those living in Bethlehem of Judea,” but she then writes that “the narrative commences with the journey to Bethlehem” (*Accessing*, 182). Raithel likewise refers to “travelers on their journey to Bethlehem” (“Beginning at the End,” 139). Amann presumes that Joseph lives in Jerusalem, and therefore that he must travel to Bethlehem (*Protévangile*, 243-45).

³⁰ Such speculation is particularly difficult if it is held that the author of PJ is unfamiliar with the geography of the region. Otherwise the proximity of Bethlehem to Jerusalem would make the latter plausible. What is more, the traditional site of the *Kathisma*, the rock on which Mary is said to have rested before giving birth, is located halfway between the two cities. Recent studies of this

experience labor pains; they are still in the territory (χώρα) of Bethlehem at the halfway point of their journey (PJ 18:2). It is possible that the author here amends the Lukan infancy narrative in order to emphasize Mary's royal heritage: she does not need to travel to the city of David; she lives there.³¹

Joseph wonders how he will register the young Virgin. He is ashamed (ἐπαισχύνεσθαι) to claim her as his wife, and fearful that someone will recognize that she is not his daughter (PJ 17:1-3).³² When she begins to labor, he helps her down from the donkey and leaves her in what is presumed to be the only source of shelter in their desolate (ἔρημος) surroundings: a cave. In contrast to his earlier departure, when he charges God with her protection (PJ 9:12), he now stations his sons outside to ensure that she is guarded properly (PJ 17:10-18:1).

The narrative switches to the first person when he leaves to seek out a Hebrew midwife, and he reports the unusual phenomena that he witnesses: "I, Joseph, was walking and not walking. I looked up to the vault of heaven and I saw it fixed (ἑστῶτα). I saw the

landmark include Stephen J. Shoemaker, "The (Re?)Discovery of the Kathisma Church and the Cult of the Virgin in Late Antique Palestine," *Maria* 2 (2001): 21-72; Rina Avner, "The Initial Celebration of the Theotokos at the Kathisma: Earliest Celebrations and the Calendar," in *The Cult of the Mother of God in Byzantium: Texts and Images* (eds. Leslie Brubaker and Mary B. Cunningham; Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 9-29.

³¹ Matthew also seems to have Mary and Joseph living in Bethlehem before the birth of Jesus (so Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 1:211-12). Similarly E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 1993), 85-88; Géza Vermès, *The Nativity: History & Legend* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 76-79.

³² Joseph's confusion, according to Foskett, "underscores the degree to which familial role and sexual status are ordinarily intertwined ... a man's wife (*gyne*) is his sexual partner, his *parthenos* is usually his daughter (*thygater*). A *parthenos* who is not his daughter and a partner who is not his *gyne* fall outside of standard familial roles. In PJ, Mary never crosses the threshold from *parthenos* to *gyne*. Instead she occupies it indefinitely. Just as Mary was never a *thygater* to Anna and Joachim, she is never a *gyne* to Joseph. The Lord's virgin retains a familial status determined only by the deity" (*Virgin Conceived*, 156-57).

clouds utterly astonished (ἐκθαμβον), and the birds of heaven at rest (ἡρεμοῦντα)” (PJ 18:3-4). He reports seeing workers paused in the act of eating (PJ 18:5-6), a shepherd halted in the act of striking his sheep (PJ 18:8-9), and goats positioned by a river, ready to drink (PJ 18:10). Then, in an instant, “everything moved on in its course” (PJ 18:11). In his well-documented study of the scene, Bovon finds that the stilling of creation is a common theme in antiquity: “It emerges often in ancient texts that tell of the intervention of the birth or death of a hero.” He maintains that “the author of the vision of Joseph, by evoking the universe and nature in Greek fashion, points to a decisive moment in the Jewish history of salvation: the birth of Jesus as the beginning of a new age, the last times.”³³ The fact that creation stills directly *after* Joseph leaves the cave suggests that he will not find a midwife in time: the birth is already happening.³⁴

The change in aspect, from a literary perspective, ensures that the reader will accompany Joseph away from the cave in his search: in the very act of reading, the reader must follow Joseph’s “I.” The pace leading up to his departure is brisk: “He helped [Mary] down (κατήγαγεν) ... found (εὑρεν) a cave ... brought her in (εἰσήγαγεν) ... positioned (παρέστησεν) his sons ... and went out (ἐξῆλθεν)” (PJ 17:11-18:2). This rigorous progression grinds to a halt with the stillness of everything outside the cave: the sky is fixed (ἵστημι), the clouds are astonished (ἐκθαμβος), the birds are at rest (ἡρεμεῖν), etc. (PJ 18:3-10). By

³³ Bovon, “Suspension,” 399, 403. Similarly in Rev 8:1, there is “silence (σιγή) in heaven” for the half hour following the lamb’s breaking the seventh seal. See also the well-known (later) Rabbinic idea that the animals, angels, and even the seas were silent when the Torah was given at Sinai (*Exod. Rab.* 29).

³⁴ Mary’s hasty delivery may be influenced by the story of the midwives in Exodus. When Pharaoh asks them why they have allowed all of the male children to live, they respond, “because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them” (Exod 1:19).

observing with him the serenity that precedes Jesus' birth, the reader is drawn into the expectation that all of creation participates in.³⁵

5.3.2. The Theophany at the Cave

Joseph sees a woman coming down from the hill country as he continues his search. She asks, "Who is the one giving birth in the cave?" (PJ 19:6).³⁶ His response illustrates his sustained efforts to preserve his (and Mary's) reputation, as well as his continuing bewilderment concerning his relationship with Mary (PJ 17:2-3, 11): she is his fiancée; she was raised in the temple; she was assigned by lot to be his wife; she is not *technically* his wife; she is pregnant by the Holy Spirit (PJ 19:8-9). Now called a midwife (μαῖα) for the first time, the woman responds, "Is this true?" (PJ 19:10). Because of the comprehensiveness of Joseph's answer, it is unclear which part prompts the question. Everything that he reports is accurate, so perhaps it is the *complexity* of his response that heightens the midwife's curiosity. Joseph's "come and see (δεῦρο καὶ ἰδέ)" suggests that he cannot fully explain the circumstances: she must behold them with her own eyes.

The author portrays the events that follow as a theophany: "They stood at the opening of the cave, and a dark cloud (νεφέλη σκοτεινή) was overshadowing (ἐπισκιάζουσα) it" (PJ 19:13). The language is reminiscent of instances in the HB/LXX where God's presence is

³⁵ So Dan Shen: "When the narrator suspends his/her retrospective perspective and adopts instead the viewpoint of the experiencing 'I' in the past, this usually functions to create immediacy and suspense" ("Difference Behind Similarity: Focalization in Third-Person Center-of-Consciousness and First-Person Retrospective Narration," in *Acts of Narrative* [eds. Carol Jacobs and Henry Sussman; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003], 85).

³⁶ Her question may imply that Joseph's sons are guarding Mary effectively: she knows that someone is giving birth, and she is curious as to who it might be, but she cannot satisfy her curiosity without consent.

made known by the existence of a cloud (נֶעַל/νέφος).³⁷ The scene itself resembles Exod 40:35, wherein Moses is unable to access the tent of meeting “because the cloud (נֶעַל/νεφέλη) settled (שָׁכַן/ἐπεσκιάζεν) upon it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle (מִשְׁכָּן/σκηνή).” And like Moses, Joseph and the midwife are prevented from entering until the appointed time.³⁸ Additionally, a cloud (νέφος) that overshadows (ἐπισκιάζειν) the disciples accompanies Jesus’ transfiguration and revelation as the Son of God in the Synoptics (Matt 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:34).

The theophanic language persists as the cloud withdraws (ὑποστέλλειν) and is replaced by a light (φῶς) that causes Joseph and the midwife to avert their eyes (PJ 19:15).³⁹ Like the imagery of the cloud, “light” in the HB/LXX often manifests the presence of God, specifically, God’s action of guiding the people of Israel.⁴⁰ Similarly in the NT, most

³⁷ Exod 13:21-22; 14:19, 24; 16:10; 19:16; 24:15-16; 33:9-10; 34:5. Also LXX Lev 16:2; Num 9:15-22; 10:11-12, 34; 11:25; 12:5, 10; 14:10, 14; 16:42; Deut 1:33; 31:15; Josh 24:7; 1 Kgs 8:10-11; 2 Chr 5:13-14; Neh 9:12, 19; 2 Macc 2:8; Wis 19:7; Sir 24:4; Ezek 10:3-4. Hock suggests that the author’s description of the cloud as dark (σκοτεινός) may be a specific reference to LXX Exod 19:16-18, where a “dark cloud (νεφέλη γνοφώδης)” occurs on Sinai (*Infancy Gospels*, 67). A similar argument may be found in de Strycker, *Forme*, 155. Also Foskett: the cloud’s overshadowing (ἐπισκιάζειν) of the cave constitutes the fulfillment of the angel’s earlier promise to Mary, “the power of God will overshadow (ἐπισκιάσει) you” (PJ 11:7) (*Virgin Conceived*, 159).

³⁸ So Durham: “As in the approach to Sinai following the covering of the cloud ... Moses must await Yahweh’s invitation before he can draw nearer to the Presence” (*Exodus*, 501).

³⁹ In *Ps.-Mt.*, light fills the cave as soon as Mary enters and recedes after Jesus is born (13.1). In the *Armenian Gospel of the Infancy*, the midwife identifies herself as none other than Eve, “the foremother of all.” She remarks to Joseph, “I have come to behold with my own eyes the redemption that is wrought on my behalf,” and later to Mary, “you restored me from that fall and established (me) in my former glory. Now my soul has been magnified and my hope has been gladdened in God my Savior” (8.10; 9.1; Terian, *Armenian*, 44).

⁴⁰ So Exod 10:23; 27:20; Lev 24:2; Pss 4:6; 35:9; 42:3; 88:15; 96:11; 118:105; Prov 20:27; Isa 2:5; 42:16; Bar 5:9.

conspicuously in the Johannine literature, light symbolizes God's action of revelation in Jesus, and indeed Jesus himself.⁴¹

The midwife marvels even before the light appears: "My soul has been magnified today, because my eyes have seen unbelievable things today (εἶδον οἱ ὀφθαλμοί μου παράδοξα σήμερον), because salvation (σωτηρία) has come to Israel" (PJ 19:14). Her words echo those of Simeon in Luke: "My eyes have seen (εἶδον οἱ ὀφθαλμοί μου) your salvation (σωτήριον), which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light (φῶς) for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel" (Luke 2:30-32). Both equate Jesus with the salvation of Israel, but one component of Simeon's speech is absent from the midwife's: that God's salvation, "a light for revelation," extends also to the Gentiles. But it is not absent for long. Directly after the midwife has spoken, light pours forth from the cave and then recedes, at which point Jesus appears and she exclaims, "How great is this day for me, for I have seen this new miracle (τὸ καινὸν θέαμα τοῦτο)" (PJ 19:17). Her description of these later events as a "new miracle" implies that they supplement what she has already seen. Just as she was amazed at the sight of the cloud, she now stands in awe at the presence of the light and the infant.

The event is a concrete manifestation of Simeon's prophecy: Jesus' birth is the dawning of God's saving action in the world, an action that extends to Jews and Gentiles. In the absence of an explicit reference to "Gentiles," this occurs not only by the midwife's echoing of Simeon's words but also by the gradual emergence of the infant through the cloud and, finally, through the light. As she departs the cave, the midwife becomes the first

⁴¹ So John 1:4-5, 7-9; 3:19-21; 5:35; 8:12; 9:5; 11:9-10; 12:35-36, 46; 1 John 1:5, 7; 2:8-10; Rev 21:24; 22:5. Also Matt 4:16; 10:27; Luke 11:35; 16:8; Acts 9:3; 12:7; 22:6-23; Rom 13:12; 2 Cor 4:6; 6:14; Eph 5:13-14; Col 1:12; 1 Thess 5:5; 1 Tim 6:16; Jas 1:17; 1 Pet 2:9.

“evangelist,” announcing the “new miracle (καινόν θεάμα)” that she has witnessed to the first person she sees, a woman named Salome.

The author presents these two characters as antithetical to one another. The midwife expresses an almost caricatured eagerness: like Simeon, she greets Jesus as Israel’s salvation, but unlike Simeon, she does so even before seeing him (PJ 19:14; Luke 2:30-32). Salome, by contrast, is skeptical, hesitant to believe what she hears without empirical proof.

5.3.3. Salome and the Midwife

When Jesus appears (φαίνειν) to those outside the cave, he begins to nurse (PJ 19:16). This distinguishes his birth from Mary’s; her mother must cleanse herself (ἀποσμήχειν) from her flow of blood (ἄφεδρος) before touching her infant (PJ 5:9-10). According to Leviticus, because of the blood that accompanies and follows parturition, which is analogous to that of menstruation (דוּת דַּגְדָּג / ἄφεδρος), a woman who bears a male or a female child is considered unclean (נָמֵץ/ἀκάθαρτος) for one or two weeks, respectively (Lev 12:2-5). As John E. Hartley notes, “the mother had to be separated from the holy until this abnormal situation was corrected, until her body was whole again.”⁴² It is therefore not surprising that Anna must delay nursing her newborn. Failure to do so would jeopardize Mary’s purity. That Mary is capable of feeding right away indicates that she, unlike her

⁴² Hartley, *Leviticus* (WBC 4; Dallas: Word, 1992), 169. Similarly Jacob Milgrom: “The loss of vaginal blood ... meant the diminution of life and, if unchecked, destruction and death” (*Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [AB 3; New York: Doubleday, 1991], 767).

mother, has no need of purification; her own labor and delivery is thus characterized by a distinct *absence* of blood.⁴³

The point is stressed by the midwife's words to Salome: "A virgin has given birth in such a way that her φύσις cannot allow for it (ἀ οὐ χωρεῖ ἡ φύσις αὐτῆς)" (PJ 19:18).⁴⁴ Her pronouncement is understood not as a confirmation of what she has been told but as the result of deductive reasoning: at no point in his conversation with her does Joseph state that Mary is a virgin, even though he refers to her as such elsewhere (so PJ 13:3). What he *does* tell her is that Mary is "pregnant (σύλλημμα) by the Holy Spirit" (PJ 19:9). Her conclusion, therefore, is based on what she sees. The fact that Salome doubts what she hears, according to Ryan Byrne, "acknowledges the reader's assumption that what goes in, however its means, must come out ... Just as intercourse could deflower a woman, so too could the vaginal delivery of a fetus. Direction of the intrusion is irrelevant."⁴⁵ Salome's suspicion is therefore well founded and possibly even shared by the reader: proof is necessary to

⁴³ So Foskett: "As in the case of the Vestals, virginity, chastity, and purity coalesce in Mary's portrayal so that she requires no postpartum ritual or purification. In contrast to Anna, who had to delay giving her breast to her infant daughter, the virgin suckles the baby Jesus as soon as he is born" (*Virgin Conceived*, 159). Cf. Luke 2:22, where both Mary and Joseph journey to Jerusalem "when the time came for their purification (καθαρισμοῦ) according to the law of Moses." Luke's portrayal of *Joseph's* purification after Jesus' birth is at least somewhat problematic in light of first-century Jewish ritual practice (so Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 1:210; Brown, *Birth*, 435-70).

⁴⁴ Throughout this episode, φύσις is understood as referring to certain components of the female anatomy (so John J. Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece* [NAW; New York: Routledge, 1990], 217-20). Examples of similar usage include Hippocrates, *Mul.* 2.143; Antonius Liberales, *Metam.* 4; Artemidorus Daldianus, *Onir.* 5.63. For the sake of decency, I refrain from translating it.

⁴⁵ Byrne, "Anatomy of a Cargo Cult: Virginity, Relic Envy, and Hallowed Boxes," in *Resurrecting the Brother of Jesus: The James Ossuary Controversy and the Quest for Religious Relics* (eds. Ryan Byrne and Bernadette McNary-Zak; Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 146.

corroborate the claim of a birth that defies nature.⁴⁶ But the intactness of Mary's φύσις suggests that the tearing of flesh typically associated with childbirth is nowhere present here. In short, the birth of Jesus is painless as well as bloodless.⁴⁷

What follows is derived from the familiar story of “doubting Thomas” in the Gospel of John. In it, Jesus’ disciples report to Thomas, “We have seen the Lord,” and he responds, “Unless (ἐὰν μὴ) I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger (βάλω τὸν δάκτυλόν μου) in the mark of the nails and my hand (βάλω μου τὴν χεῖρα) in his side, I will not believe (οὐ μὴ πιστεύσω)” (John 20:25). Salome’s rejoinder is similar: “Unless (ἐὰν μὴ) I put my finger into (βαλῶ τὸν δάκτυλόν μου) and examine her φύσις, I will not believe (οὐ μὴ πιστεύσω) that a virgin has given birth” (PJ 19:19). But Thomas never *actually* inserts his finger into Jesus’ wounds. Jesus appears to him, offers his body for examination, and implores him, “Do not be unfaithful, but faithful (μὴ γίνου ἄπιστος ἀλλὰ πιστός)” (John 20:27; my translation). This is enough for Thomas, who exclaims, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28). Salome, by comparison, proceeds with her physical examination: “[She] put (ἔβαλε) her finger into [Mary’s] φύσις” (PJ 20:2).⁴⁸ And as her hand begins to burn, she realizes the

⁴⁶ As Bauer once remarked, “one does not argue the question whether a virgin can conceive, but whether she can give birth without losing her characteristic condition” (*Das Leben Jesu*, 69).

⁴⁷ This detail is developed in subsequent texts, most notably the second-century *Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah*, whose birth narrative is likely dependent on PJ. In this text, Jesus’ arrival catches Mary by surprise: “and after two months [of marriage], when Joseph was in his house, and his wife Mary, but both alone, it came to pass, while they were alone, that Mary straightway beheld with her eyes and saw a small child, and she was amazed. And when her amazement wore off, her womb was found as it was before she was with child” (11.7-9). Shortly thereafter, residents of Bethlehem respond to rumors about her having borne a child only two months into her marriage: “She has not given birth: the midwife has not gone up [to her] and we have heard no cries of pain” (11.14; *NTApoc*² 2:618). A similar view is expressed in the late-first/ early-second-century *Odes of Solomon*: “so the Virgin became a mother with great mercies. And she labored and bore the Son but without pain, because it did not occur without purpose. And she did not seek a midwife, because he caused her to give life” (19.7-9; *OTP* 2:752).

⁴⁸ In the *Armenian Gospel of the Infancy*, she is prevented from actually proceeding with her

magnitude of her mistake. Unlike Thomas, who heeds Jesus' warning to not be unfaithful (ἄπιστος), Salome now bemoans her own ἀπιστία (PJ 20:3).

Her examination is reported graphically, its consequences in comparable detail: "Behold, my hand is falling away from me in fire (ἡ χεὶρ μου πυρὶ ἀποπίπτει ἀπ' ἐμοῦ)" (PJ 20:4). Her prayer (PJ 20:5-7), the angel's instructions to her (PJ 20:8-9), and her obedience to them (PJ 20:10-11) are likewise recounted in full. It is therefore surprising that neither Salome nor the narrator discloses the *object* or the *results* of her search: she sets out to inspect Mary's φύσις, but what she hopes to find is never made explicit. Presumably she is searching for either an intact hymen, which would prove that Mary is physically still a virgin, or traces of blood, which would prove that she is not. But the author does not divulge what she finds or the conclusions that she reaches, namely, he or she does not specify that Salome discovered (or did not discover) Mary's virginity to be intact.

Even in the absence of these details, the episode establishes that Mary *does* remain virginal after giving birth. Like Thomas, who seeks physical proof to validate the disciples' "we have seen the Lord" (John 20:25), Salome seeks tangible evidence to confirm the midwife's seemingly incredible claim about Mary's postpartum condition. While she follows through with her plan and Thomas does not, the result for both is the same: a confession of faith. Thomas's "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28) denotes his acceptance of the disciples' earlier words to him. Similarly, Salome's declaration that Jesus is "King of Israel" (PJ 20:10) evidences the reliability of the midwife's words.

investigation: "As Salome entered the cave and reached out her hand, wishing to get close to the Virgin, suddenly fire burst from there and blistered and burned her hand" (9.5; Terian, *Armenian*, 46).

Salome's willingness to *worship* (προσκυνεῖν) the infant, a stipulation not present in the angel's instructions to her, shows that she is not simply seeking an antidote to her physical affliction; she has undergone a conversion. The manner in which she leaves the cave reinforces this. Just as Joachim leaves the temple "justified (δεδικαιωμένος)," having confirmed that God had been merciful and forgiven his sins and, consequently, that the angel's message concerning Anna's pregnancy was true (PJ 4:4; 5:3-4), so now Salome leaves the cave "justified (δεδικαιωμένη)," healed from the consequences of her prior disbelief (PJ 20:11).

Jesus' words to Thomas loom in the background of this episode, should its readers be tempted to dismiss Salome's unfortunate experience as inconsequential for their own: "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe" (John 20:29). Because they cannot be present and hazard their own examination of the Virgin, readers are called to accept the midwife's words as trustworthy. Salome's examination and its consequences substantiate this claim while simultaneously exhorting readers not to doubt but believe.

5.4. The Reader and the Intertextual Canon

The birth narrative corroborates the notion that Mary's virginity remains intact even after bearing a child, and her ability to nurse her son immediately after he is born suggests that his delivery was both bloodless and painless. It is also christological, for the Virgin's postpartum status is but one of the miracles that accompany Jesus' birth: the cloud and the light that fill the space, not to mention the suspension of time experienced by Joseph, testify to her extraordinary son. That the birth takes place in a cave makes sense in the narrative:

Joseph and Mary are outside Bethlehem, and Joseph seeks shelter for his laboring wife in the midst of their otherwise deserted surroundings.

Even so, the significance of this setting entails more than its plausibility. In Greek and Roman literature and legend, caves are often places where gods and heroes are conceived, born, and raised, and in this light a cave is perhaps the *ideal* setting for Mary to give birth to her divine son. In the HB/LXX, by contrast, they are not locations in which one would typically expect to witness a birth, let alone encounter the divine. Instead, they are sanctuaries for refugees and as graves. The latter of these two is evident in the Passion Narratives, where Jesus himself is buried in a cavelike structure after his execution.

5.4.1. Cave-Births in Greek and Roman Literature and Legend

In the *Odyssey*, several prominent characters reside in caves, including Calypso (1.15; 5.55-84, 194-95), the Cyclops (2.19-20; 9.182-476), Scylla (12.80-84), and the Naiads (13.349, 366-67). But gods and heroes do more than live in caves; several are born and raised in them. In a legend recounted by Hesiod, the primordial sea-goddess Ceto lives in an oceanic cave (σπέος) where she gives birth to Echidna, the “mother of all monsters.” Echidna later lives in a comparable cave (σπέος), “far from the immortal gods and mortal human beings” (*Theog.* 295-302 [Most, LCL]). Similarly, in Diodorus Siculus, Dionysus is brought after his birth to a cave (ἄντρον) on an island in the Triton River, where he is entrusted to and raised by Nysa, a daughter of Aristaeus (3.69.1-70.1).

Perseus, Zeus, and Hermes are among the gods and heroes born in such places. The setting of their births is typically explained in terms of fear or anxiety on the part of the mother or other relative: Hermes’s mother lives in a cave because she is timid; the mother of

Zeus travels to a cave to give birth because she is afraid that her husband will eat her newborn; and Perseus's mother is confined to an underground chamber by her father who has been told by an oracle that his grandson will kill him. The father of each child is decidedly missing from their birth narratives, owing to what is commonly called the "absent-father archetype," a motif employed frequently in ancient and modern literature.⁴⁹

I begin with Perseus, whom I introduce by way of the Persian-turned-Greco-Roman deity Mithras, whose iconography and cult may be rooted in the Perseus myth. What is more, since parallels between the births of Jesus and Mithras have been claimed since at least the second century (by Justin Martyr, above), a brief foray into this mystery religion seems an appropriate place to start.

5.4.1.1. Mithras/Perseus

Mithraism was arguably one of the most popular mystery religions of antiquity, its membership and geographical expanse rivaling (possibly even surpassing) that of Christianity in the first centuries of the Common Era. What we know of Mithraism is derived chiefly from its iconography which, because the majority of Mithraea were built

⁴⁹ Carl G. Jung defines archetype as "an irrepresentable, unconscious, pre-existent form that seems to be part of the inherited structure of the psyche and can therefore manifest itself spontaneously anywhere, at any time." The concept is based on his observations of frequently recurring motifs in myths, fairytales, and dreams ("A Psychological View of Conscience," in *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung* [20 vols.; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964], 10:449). So also Andrew M. Colman, via Jung: an archetype as "an inherited mental structure or pattern, forming part of the collective unconscious, observable only through its manifestations in behavior, especially that associated with ancient and universal experiences such as birth, marriage, motherhood, and death" (*A Dictionary of Psychology* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006], 53).

underground, is remarkably well preserved.⁵⁰ Since much of this iconography is esoteric, our knowledge of the precise tenets of Mithraism remains hypothetical at best.

One of the more prominent Mithraic icons is a depiction of Mithras slaughtering a bull while surrounded by various creatures and objects.⁵¹ Commonly called the *tauroctony*, it is found in every known Mithraeum, always in the central niche. Because the figures accompanying the deity (e.g., dog, snake, cup, lion, bull) are readily identified with constellations (e.g., Canis Major, Hydra, Crater, Leo, Taurus), most scholars agree that the image is astral, but the significance of Mithras himself is a point of contention. Ulansey suggests that because the figures alongside Mithras represent constellations, the same must be true for the deity. And he connects Mithras with Perseus, whose constellation is situated directly above Taurus, the bull.⁵²

⁵⁰ There do exist some texts that may be valuable to the study of Mithraism, including the so-called Mithras Liturgy, titled and popularized by Albrecht Dieterich in *Eine Mithrasliturgie* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1903). But Marvin Meyer: the origins of this document and the type of Mithraism it represents are debatable (*The 'Mithras Liturgy'* [SBLTT 10; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1976], viii; idem, "The Mithras Liturgy," in *The Historical Jesus in Context* [eds. Amy-Jill Levine et al.; PRR; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006], 179-80). Hans Dieter Betz argues (convincingly, in my view) that "the Mithras Liturgy occupies a precarious place between various ancient traditions," and that "its development took place in an Egyptian religious milieu under the influence of Hellenistic philosophy" (*The 'Mithras Liturgy': Text, Translation, and Commentary* [STAC 18; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003], 37).

⁵¹ Examples in Maarten Jozef Vermaseren, *Mithriaca I: The Mithraeum at S. Maria Capua Vetere* (EPRO 16.1; Leiden: Brill, 1971), pl. 3; idem, *Mithriaca II: The Mithraeum at Ponza* (EPRO 16.2; Leiden: Brill, 1974), pls. 22, 33; idem, *Mithriaca III: The Mithraeum at Marino* (EPRO 16.3; Leiden: Brill, 1982), pls. 4, 11, 20-22, 24-28, 30, 32.

⁵² Ulansey, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries: Cosmology and Salvation in the Ancient World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 24-26. Aratus describes the constellation thus: "[Andromeda's] two feet will guide thee to her bridegroom, Perseus, over whose shoulder they are for ever carried. But he moves in the North a taller form than the others. His right hand is stretched toward the throne of the mother his bride, and, as if pursuing that which lies before his feet, he greatly strides, dust-stained, in the heaven of Zeus" (*Phaen.* 248-53 [Mair LCL]). Further descriptions in *ibid.*, 480-84, 685-88, 710-12.

Parallels between Mithras and Perseus are numerous.⁵³ One of the more significant is that both are associated with underground spaces, the former by virtue of his “birth” from a rock, a scene depicted often in painting and sculpture.⁵⁴ Mithras is considered by his followers to be “the new light-bearer (*genitor luminis*), born from the rock (*deus genitor rupe natus*), from a rock that gives birth (*petra genetrix*).”⁵⁵ While the claim that Mithras was born from a rock is certainly not equivalent to his being born underground, the Mithraists’ desire for their sanctuaries to resemble caverns allows for the possibility that they imagined their god’s birth as occurring in a comparable space. As Ulansey argues, “it is tempting to speculate that the Mithraists understood their subterranean temples as symbolizing the interior of the rock out of which Mithras was born, in which case we could conclude that Mithras, like Perseus, was believed to have been born in an underground cavern.”⁵⁶

Mithras’s cave-birth remains conjectural. But the notion that Perseus was born in a cave, or at least in a cavern-like space, is attested explicitly in ancient literature. Labeled by Homer as “preeminent (*ἀριδείκετον*) above all warriors” (*Il.* 14.319 [Murray and Wyatt, LCL]), and by Diodorus as “the mightiest Greek of his day” (249 [Oldfather, LCL]), Perseus is known for his rescue of Andromeda and for slaying the legendary Gorgon Medusa.⁵⁷ The

⁵³ Outlined in *ibid.*, 25-39.

⁵⁴ Examples in Vermaseren, *Mithriaca III*, pls 6, 14; *idem*, *Mithras, de geheimzinnige god* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1959), 61, 62.

⁵⁵ So Vermaseren, *Mithras, de geheimzinnige god*, 60. The tradition is known to Justin Martyr (who was almost certainly not a Mithraist), which testifies to its prominence even among those outside the cult.

⁵⁶ Ulansey, *Origins*, 35-36.

⁵⁷ So Pindar, *Pyth.* 10.44-48; Quintas Smyrnaeus, *Fall* 10.195-98; Ovid, *Metam.* 4.604-803.

story of his birth, as preserved by Pseudo-Apollodorus, begins when a certain Acrisius learns from an oracle that his daughter, Danae, will bear a son who will later kill him. “Fearing that,” the story goes, “Acrisius built a brazen chamber underground (ὑπὸ γῆν θάλαμον κατασκεύασας) and there guarded [her].”⁵⁸ His measures are no match for what had been decreed, for she becomes pregnant either by Proteus or by Zeus, the latter of whom is said to have entered through the roof of her chamber “in the shape of a stream of gold.”⁵⁹ After Danae gives birth, presumably while still underground, Acrisius puts her and Perseus in a chest (λάρναξ) and casts (ρίπτειν) them into the sea (*Bibl.* 2.4 [Frazer, LCL]).⁶⁰

Regardless of whether one considers them synonymous or even complementary, the Mithras and Perseus myths convey an important point: that underground spaces in Greek and Roman mythology are suitable for the births of gods and heroes. The ancient reader of PJ therefore see the cave that Jesus is born in as a mark of his divinity or, at the very least, that he will be renowned. In the following sections I examine two equally distinguished figures from the pantheon, Zeus and Hermes, whose births are said to have occurred in similar places.

⁵⁸ The details of Danae’s imprisonment and the location of Perseus’ birth are inconsistent at times, Horace (ca. 65-8 B.C.E.) claiming that she was in a tower (*turris*) (*Carm.* 3.16), Lucian that she was in a chamber (θάλαμος), but not necessarily an underground one (*Dial. Mar.* 12.319). According to Sophocles (ca. 496-405 B.C.E.), her chamber was surrounded by “walls of bronze (χαλκοδέτοις αὐλαῖς),” and he describes it as “tomblike (τυμβήρει)” (*Ant.* 947-948).

⁵⁹ Perseus as son of Danae and Zeus in Homer, *Il.* 14.319-20; Hesiod, *Scut. Herc.* 216, 219; Hyginus, *Fab.* 155; Ovid, *Metam.* 4.604-611; Diodorus Siculus, *Libr.* 4.9; Pindar, *Pyth.* 12.16; Lucian, *Dial. d.* 6.1, 8.2.

⁶⁰ The story is recounted similarly in Hyginus, who claims that the pair was rescued near the island of Seriphos (*Fab.* 63). So also Strabo, *Geog.* 10.510. According to one legend in Lucian, they are still floating around (*Dial. Mar.* 13.320), while in another, they are said to have been rescued (*Dial. Mar.* 14.322).

5.4.1.2. Zeus

The story of Zeus's birth, like that of Perseus, begins with a father's fear of death by the hand of his own progeny. In Hesiod's account, Zeus's father Cronus hears from his and his wife's parents, Earth (Γαῖα) and Sky (Οὐρανός), that he will be overpowered (δαμῆναι) by one of his own children. Because of this, he swallows whatever offspring are born to him (*Theog.* 464-67). His wife Rhea, already pregnant with Zeus, wishes to save her son from this fate. Her parents instruct her to travel to Crete and to give birth there. When Zeus is born, he is received (δέξασθαι), nursed (τραφέμεν), and reared (δέξασθαι) by Γαῖα herself: "Taking him in her hands she concealed him in a deep cave (ἄντρον ἐν ἡλιβάτῳ), under the hidden places of the holy earth (ζαθέης ὑπὸ κεύθεσι γαίης), in the Aegean mountain, abounding with forests" (*Theog.* 467-84 [Most, LCL]). In order that Cronus's deception might be complete, she swaddles (σπαργανᾶν) a large stone and gives it to him to swallow, which he does promptly (*Theog.* 485-91).⁶¹

The circumstances of Zeus's birth are repeated with some modifications by Pseudo-Apollodorus. Having seen five of her children (Hestia, Demeter, Hera, Pluto, and Poseidon) consumed by their father, Rhea, "when she was big with Zeus (ὀπηνίκα τὸν Δία ἐγκυμονοῦσα ἐτύγγανε)," escapes to Crete and gives birth in a cave (ἄντρον) of Dicte. She leaves her baby there, under the protection of the nymphs and the Curetes. The nymphs nurture the young god with milk from a goat (named Amalthea), while the Curetes ensure that his presence in the cave remains a secret: "The Curetes in arms guarded (φυλάσσοντες) the babe in the cave

⁶¹ So also Ovid: "A stone concealed in a garment went down the heavenly throat; so had fate decreed that the sire should be beguiled" (*Fasti* 4.205-06 [Most, LCL]).

(ἄντρῳ), clashing their spears on their shields in order that Cronus might not hear the child's voice" (*Libr.* 1.6-7 [Frazer, LCL]).⁶²

The tradition of the Curetes' noise outside the cave is attested elsewhere. Virgil writes concerning the bees on whose honey the deity is said to have dined: "I will unfold—even the reward, for which they followed the tuneful sounds and clashing bronzes of the Curetes, and fed the king of Heaven within the cave (*antro*) of Dicte" (*Georg.* 4.149-152 [Fairclough, LCL]). Strabo comments similarly that the Curetes, "by surrounding the goddess with tambourines and similar noisy instruments and with war-dance and uproar, were supposed to strike terror into Cronus and without his knowledge to steal his child away and that, according to tradition, Zeus was actually reared by them with the same diligence" (*Geogr.* 10.3.11 [Jones, LCL]). Strabo refers later in the same work to the "chamber (θάλαμος)" of the Curetes and the "sacred haunts (ἁγῆες ἐναυλοί) of Crete that gave birth to Zeus" (10.3.13 [Jones, LCL]), both understood as subtle references to Zeus's cave-birth.⁶³ The Curetes' function is therefore similar to that of Joseph's sons: protection of the cave's inhabitant(s).

⁶² The tradition of Zeus's cave-birth on Crete is so established in antiquity that it is identified with an *actual* cave on the island. Plato, for example, mentions "the cave and temple of Zeus (τὸ τοῦ Διὸς ἄντρον καὶ ἱερόν)" as a location accessible by means of the road from Cnossus, a leading Cretan city (*Leg.* 1.625a-625b).

⁶³ So also Callimachus *Hymn* 1.51-53; Euripides, *Bacch.* 120-121. According to Ovid, the tradition of the Curetes is so well known that it continues to be acted out in ritual fashion: "The secret was kept, and the ancient deed is still acted in mimicry; the attendants of the goddess thump the brass and the rumbling leather; cymbals they strike instead of helmets, and drums instead of shields" (*Fasti* 4.210-14 [Most, LCL]).

5.4.1.3. Hermes

Hermes, child of Maia and Zeus and the “messenger of the immortals” (Hesiod, *Theog.* 939 [Most, LCL]), is remarkable and mischievous from the moment of his birth. This is illustrated by a Lucianic dialogue between Hephaestus and Apollo.⁶⁴ The former remarks, “Have you seen how bonny Maia’s newborn baby is, Apollo, and what a nice smile it has for everyone? You can already see it’ll be a real treasure.” Apollo responds, “That baby a real treasure, Hephaestus? Why, it’s already older than Iapetus when it comes to mischief ... ask Poseidon—it stole his trident—or Ares—it filched his sword out of his scabbard—not to mention myself—it disarmed me of my bow and arrows.” Hephaestus is stunned: “What? That newborn infant, which can hardly stand up, and is still in baby-clothes (σπαργάνοις)?” Apollo replies, “You’ll see for yourself, my dear fellow, if he gets near you” (*Dial. d.* 11.220-21 [Macleod, LCL]).⁶⁵

Hermes’s impishness distinguishes him from his mother, who in *Homeric Hymn* 4 is labeled as quite shy (αἰδοῖος). She lives in a cave (ἄντρον), far away from the other gods, and it is in this cave that Hermes is conceived, born, and reared: “There the son of Cronus used to lie with the rich-tressed nymph, unseen by deathless gods and mortal men ... And when the purpose of great Zeus was fulfilled ... she was delivered and a notable thing was come to

⁶⁴ Hermes as child of Maia and Zeus in Aeschylus, *Frag.* 212; Alcaeus, *Frag.* 308; *Orphic Hymn* 28; Ovid, *Metam.* 1.583; Virgil, *Aen.* 8.134; Philostratus, *Imag.* 1.26; Lucian, *Dial. d.* 4. In *Orphic Hymn* 57, he is said to be the offspring of Aphrodite and Dionysus.

⁶⁵ Similarly in the *Homeric Hymns* reference is made to the one-day-old Hermes playing the lyre and stealing Apollo’s livestock (*HH* 4.17-18). So also Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 5.15; Horace, *Carm.* 1.10. Hermes is remembered for more than his rowdy childhood: just as Perseus is said to have slain Medusa, so legend holds that Hermes defeated Argus, a many-eyed giant and servant of Hera (Hesiod, *Op.* 67-68, 77, 83-85).

pass. For then she bare a son, of many shifts, blandly cunning, a robber, a cattle driver, a bringer of dreams, a watcher by night, a thief at the gates, one who was soon to show forth wonderful deeds among the deathless gods” (*HH* 4.3-7 [West, LCL]).⁶⁶

The tradition of Hermes’s cave-birth almost certainly does not originate with this hymn, and the author seems to recount it with a degree of caution. Later in the same hymn, the young Hermes *rebukes* his mother for her reclusiveness: “Better to live in fellowship with the deathless gods continually, rich, wealthy, and enjoying stores of grain, than to sit always in a gloomy cave (ἄντρον)” (4.170-72 [West, LCL]). For the author of *Homeric Hymn* 4, the cave is not *necessarily* an honorable or even a fitting place for a goddess to give birth to a god; it happens there because Hermes’s mother wishes to live in seclusion. The author’s need to *justify* the location may indicate that it was simply too ingrained to pass over.

Questions of its origins aside, the story of Hermes’s birth in *Homeric Hymn* 4 provides the basis for subsequent retelling, most notably that of Pseudo-Apollodorus: “Maia, the eldest [of Atlas and Pleione], as the fruit of her intercourse with Zeus, gave birth to Hermes in a cave (ἄντρον) of Cyllene. He was laid in swaddling-bands (σπαργάνοις) on the winnowing fan, but he slipped out and made his way to Pieria and stole the kine which Apollo was herding” (*Bibl.* 3.10.2 [Frazer, LCL]).⁶⁷ In contrast to the author of the *Homeric Hymn*, Pseudo-Apollodorus does not seek to defend the location of Hermes’s birth: no mention is made of Maia’s timidity or of Hermes’s discontent with their lodgings. The cave

⁶⁶ Also *HH* 18:5-8: “Ever she avoided the throng of the blessed gods and lived in a shadowy cave (ἄντρον παλίσκῳ), and there the Son of Cronos used to lie with the rich-tressed nymph at dead of night, while white-armed Hera lay bound in sweet sleep: and neither deathless god nor mortal man knew it” (West, LCL). Cf. the account of Hesiod, in which Hermes is conceived after Maia goes up (εἰσαναβαίνειν) into Zeus’ bed (*Theog.* 938).

⁶⁷ In alternate Latin traditions, Hermes is born on the ridge of Mount Cyllene (Ovid, *Fasti* 5.79, 663; Virgil, *Aeneid* 8.134).

is presented in straightforward fashion as the birthplace and childhood home of a prominent god.

5.4.2. Caves in the HB/LXX

In the HB/LXX, caves provide asylum for persons in dire straights and places to bury the dead.⁶⁸ They are similar to those in the preceding material to the extent that they are hardly ever construed as “ideal” lodgings: persons who take shelter in them typically do so under duress.⁶⁹ This is certainly the case for Joseph and Mary; the cave seems to have been the only source of protection available to them. They are distinct insofar as they are typically *not* locations where one would expect to encounter the divine.⁷⁰ Their serving as places of burial in the Pentateuch casts the birth of Jesus’ in a paradoxical, even morbid light: caves are places for the recently deceased, not the newly born. And I suggest that both of these inform the reader’s perception of what transpires in PJ.

Lot and his daughters are the first characters in the HB/LXX to seek refuge in a cave (σπήλαιον), and they do so after escaping the destruction of Sodom (Gen 19:30). In Gordon J. Wenham’s view, their living in this type of place is polemical:

Lot, the rich rancher who had so many flocks and herds that he had to separate from Abraham (13:8-11), chose to live in the fertile Dead Sea valley, which has been

⁶⁸ Similarly in the NT: in John 11:38, Lazarus is said to have been buried in a cave (the only instance in the NT in which a σπήλαιον is a place of burial); in Heb 11:38, reference is made to persons wandering (πλανᾶν) in caves to escape persecution; and in Rev 6:15, various persons hide in caves in order to escape the wrath of God.

⁶⁹ An exception is LXX Isa 33:15-16: “The one walking in righteousness ... will dwell in a high cave (ὕψηλῳ σπηλαίῳ) of a mighty rock.”

⁷⁰ Elijah does experience a theophany while he is in a cave, but he does so as a refugee hiding from Jezebel (1 Kgs 19:1-18).

destroyed and with it all his other relations and property. He and all he has can be accommodated in a cave. His ruin can hardly be more complete. We may be inclined to sympathize with Lot's plight, but it is not so clear that Genesis does.⁷¹

Shortly after they arrive, his daughters trick him into sleeping with them, and they become pregnant (Gen 19:31-36). It is at least implied that they give birth while they are still living there, and as such, theirs are the only cave-births in the HB/LXX. Their deception gives rise to two rival nations of Israel, the Moabites and the Ammonites (Gen 19:37-38), casting the cave and the events that transpire there a negative light.⁷²

For the prophet Jeremiah, caves are locations that persons hide (unsuccessfully) in order to escape God's judgment. The residents of Jerusalem are said to have "crawled into caves (εἰσέδυσαν εἰς τὰ σπήλαια)" at the sound of horses approaching the city (LXX Jer 4:29), and as Peter C. Craigie argues, "this poetic passage ... contrasts the inevitability of Jerusalem's judgment with the obtuseness of its citizens in failing to perceive the finality of their plight, seeking always a final escape from their doom."⁷³ Later, in his Temple Sermon the prophet likens the temple to a robbers' cave (σπήλαιον) (LXX Jer 7:11), a charge repeated

⁷¹ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (WBC 1; Dallas: Word, 1987), 60. Also Claus Westermann: "the cave" was possibly "a particular cave known to the listeners" (*Genesis 12-36: A Commentary* [trans. John J. Scullion; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985], 313). Similarly Gerhard von Rad: "Now we find [Lot] in 'the' cave, a place apparently with which a particular tradition was connected which would have been familiar to the readers of that time" (*Genesis: A Commentary* [trans. John H. Marks; OTL; rev. ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972], 223). Cf. E. A. Speiser, *Genesis: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 1; Garden City: Doubleday, 1964), 145.

⁷² Wenham considers the possibility that this story was actually transmitted among the Ammonites and Moabites: "Certainly the names the mothers give to the children, Moab, 'from the father,' and Ben-Ammi, 'son of my people,' does not indicate that they felt ashamed of their deed" (*Genesis 1-15*, 60).

⁷³ Craigie, *Jeremiah 1-25* (WBC 26; Dallas: Word, 1991), 83-84. In Isaiah, the people attempt to hide their idols in similar places: "They will conceal all their hand-made things, carrying them into the caves, into the fissures of the rock and the holes of the earth, from the presence of the fear of the Lord and from the glory of his strength, when he should rise to break apart the earth" (LXX Isa 2:18-19).

by Jesus in the Synoptics (Matt 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46). In LXX Jer 12:9, God describes the people thus: “Is my inheritance (κληρονομία) not a hyena’s cave (σπήλαιον ύαίνης) to me, or a cave (σπήλαιον) all around her?” Finally, the consequences of the peoples’ disobedience are detailed: “Her times have come. Open her storehouses, search her like a cave (σπήλαιον), and eradicate her. Let there be no remnant left” (LXX Jer 27:26).⁷⁴

Those who take up residence in caves in the HB/LXX are not always portrayed in a negative light. They are often the most effective places to hide from enemies: the people of Israel retreat to caves to escape various foreign powers (Judg 6:2; 1 Sam 13:6; 2 Macc 6:11); Samson goes to live in a cave after a violent encounter with the Philistines (Judg 15:8); and Obadiah recounts to Elijah how he hid the prophets of YHWH in caves to protect them from Jezebel (1 Kgs 18:13).⁷⁵ David evades Saul by escaping to the cave of Adullam, where he is joined by roughly four hundred others (1 Sam 22:1-2). They remain there for some time, and the story of their sojourn is repeated elsewhere (2 Sam 23:13; LXX Pss 56, 141). In all of these instances the persons who hide in caves are Israelites who do so in order to escape capture or death.

Caves also provide places of rest for the deceased. During the conquest narrative, foreign kings take up arms against the Gibeonites who had recently entered into a treaty with Israel. When they are defeated, they hide in a cave (σπήλαιον) in Makeda (Josh 10:16). Eventually, Joshua brings them out, slaughters (ἀποκτείνειν) them, hangs them from trees for the rest of the day, throws (ρίπτειν) them back into the cave and seals the entrance with

⁷⁴ Similarly LXX Ezek 33:27: “I shall slay by death those in walled places and in caves”; Isa 32:14: “The villages will forever be caves.”

⁷⁵ In 2 Maccabees, the people go to a cave in order to keep Sabbath. They reflect on this experience later (2 Macc 10:6).

stones (Josh 10:22-27). The space that once provided a place of refuge now serves as a tomb for the refugees.

One of the most prominent tombs in the HB/LXX is the cave in which Abraham and his descendants are said to have been interred. The account of Abraham's acquisition of this cave, commonly called the Cave of Machpelah, or "Cave of the Double Tombs," employs a variety of terminology related to burial. When his wife Sarah dies, Abraham seeks a tomb (קבר/τάφος) for her, and the sons of Chet offer him one of their "choicest burial places (קברי/μνημείοις)" (Gen 23:1-6). He accepts their offer, and requests that "the cave of Machpelah (מכפלה/τὸ σπήλαιον τὸ διπλοῦν)" be given to him so that he might use it as a tomb (קבר/μνημεῖον). He purchases the cave and the field it is situated in, and proceeds to bury Sarah (Gen 23:8-20). Abraham himself is later buried in this cave (Gen 25:9), as are Isaac, Rebekah, Leia, Jacob (Gen 49:29-50:14).⁷⁶ Wenham suggests that Abraham's procurement of the cave is a foreshadowing of his descendants' eventual occupation of Palestine: "Here [he] acquires a very small part of Canaan, but that reminds us how much was still to become his."⁷⁷ The cave is thus a symbol of the divine promise, not only that Abraham's descendants will inherit the land, but also that it will remain rightfully theirs.

The various presentations of caves in the HB/LXX leave the reader with a range of images: they are places of protection for those fleeing violence; places in which hiding amounts to an admission of guilt before God; places of deception and incest; and places to

⁷⁶ The burials of Isaac, Rebekah, and Leia are not narrated, but are recounted by Jacob (Gen 49:31). So also Philo, *Post.* 62. According to later tradition, Jacob's sons are also buried there (*T. Reu.* 7.2; *T. Sim.* 8.2; *T. Levi* 19.5; *T. Jud.* 26.4; *T. Iss.* 7.8; *T. Zeb.* 10.7; *T. Naph.* 9.1; *T. Gad.* 8.5; *T. Ash.* 8.1; *T. Benj.* 12.3; *T. Dan* 7.2; *T. Jos.* 20.6).

⁷⁷ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 130.

inter and honor the dead. Yet for all their differences, these images converge on a simple point: a cave is no place for a newborn. The cave in PJ is clearly not intended as a polemic against Joseph, much less Mary or Jesus, but the evidence from the HB/LXX establishes the location as a thoroughly undesirable, even scandalous place for the utterly pure Mary to give birth. While Joseph and Mary do not lodge there in order to escape violence, their doing so implies that they are, in a sense, refugees seeking shelter in otherwise inhospitable, even dangerous surroundings. They are also places of burial, and in what follows I suggest that the location and circumstances of Jesus' birth foreshadow (paradoxically) his own death and interment.

5.4.3. Passion Narratives

The cross event is the central preoccupation of the canonical evangelists.⁷⁸ To employ the language of Martin Kähler's now-famous footnote, it is possible to conceive of the gospels as "passion narratives with extended introductions."⁷⁹ The death of Jesus, in this regard, is a sort of hermeneutical lens through which to understand the scope of his life, including his birth. The reader who approaches PJ's birth narrative with this in mind is bound to recognize a number of parallels and antitheses between it and the Passion Narratives. While the correspondences between them underline the complementarity of the beginning and end of Jesus' earthly life, the antitheses encourage the reader to see the cross event as the moment at which he is born Israel's Messiah.

⁷⁸ For the purposes of this study, the "cross event" comprises events leading up to and following the crucifixion, including the passion and resurrection.

⁷⁹ Kähler, *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic, Biblical Christ* (trans. Carl E. Braaten; Philadelphia: Forgress, 1964), 80 n. 11.

5.4.3.1. Parallels

In all of the canonical gospels, Joseph of Arimathea approaches Pilate after the crucifixion to request custody of Jesus' body. When it is given to him, he dresses it and places it into a tomb (μνημεῖον in Matt 27:59-65; Mark 15:43-46; John 19:40; and μνῆμα in Luke 23:50-53).⁸⁰ The difference between the σπήλαιον of PJ and the μνημεῖον/μνῆμα of the Passion Narratives is simple: the former is a naturally occurring space whereas the latter is cut by hand.⁸¹ But it is unlikely that the ancient reader would have been preoccupied by this discrepancy; already in the lxx, in the account of Abraham's procurement of the Cave of Machpelah, μνημεῖον and σπήλαιον are used interchangeably, both referring to a place of burial (τάφος) (Gen 23:8-20; also 49:30; 50:13). A similar conflation occurs in John's account of the raising of Lazarus: "Then Jesus ... came to the tomb (μνημεῖον). It was a cave (σπήλαιον), and a stone was lying against it" (John 11:38). But while all of these terms are more or less comparable regarding the spaces they designate, they differ to the extent that μνημεῖα/μνήματα exist solely for honoring the dead.

⁸⁰ None of the evangelists elaborates on this otherwise unknown character, which may speak to his prominence in the early tradition. Matthew says that he was rich (πλούσιος), Mark that he was respected (εὐσχήμων), and Luke that he is both good (ἀγαθός) and just (δίκαιος) (Matt 27:57; Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50). The latter two add that he was "waiting for the kingdom of God" (Mark 15:43; Luke 23:51). According to John, he was "a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews" (John 19:38). With respect to his role in the burial, he is presumably included in the "they took (ἔλαβον) the body of Jesus" in John 19:40.

⁸¹ In Matthew, the μνημεῖον belongs to Joseph himself, who is ultimately responsible for its creation: "and [he] laid [the body] in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock (καὶ ἔθηκεν αὐτὸ ἐν τῷ καινῷ αὐτοῦ μνημείῳ ὃ ἐλατόμησεν ἐν τῇ πέτρᾳ)" (Matt 27:60). The accounts of Mark and Luke are similar: "[he] laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock (ἔθηκεν αὐτὸν ἐν μνημείῳ ὃ ἦν λελατομημένον ἐκ πέτρας)" (Mark 15:46); "[he] laid it in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid (ἔθηκεν αὐτὸν ἐν μνήματι λαξευτῷ οὗ οὐκ ἦν οὐδεὶς οὐπω κείμενος)" (Luke 23:53). In John, it is simply "a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid (μνημεῖον καινὸν ἐν ᾧ οὐδέπω οὐδεὶς ἦν τεθειμένος)" (John 19:41).

Luz suggests that Joseph's relinquishing of his *own* tomb in Matthew is a sign of respect: "[Jesus] was not buried anonymously in the Jewish cemetery for criminals nor was he simply put in the ground in a paupers' cemetery; he was given a respectable, indeed, a noble burial."⁸² Mark, Luke, and John do not specify that Jesus is buried in Joseph's tomb, but the connotation is the same: the one who was executed as a criminal is not buried as one. The *μνημα/μνημεῖον* thus provides a sense of fulfillment for the reader of PJ: the space he is born in is questionable, but the one in which he is buried is designed to hold the body of one worthy of honor.

The miraculous events that coincide with the beginning of Jesus' life and its termination are likewise significant. The suspension of time at his birth signals to the reader its cosmic scope, and draws him or her into the awe of creation. While no exact parallel exists in the Synoptic Gospels, references are made to comparable phenomena that occur at the moment of his death. After his final breath in Matthew, the earth shakes (*σεῖν*) and rocks are split apart (*σχίξιν*); many tombs are opened (*ἀνοίγειν*), their occupants resurrected (*ἐγείρειν*) (Matt 27:51-52). And in Mark and Luke, darkness covers the land just before he dies (Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44-45). What is more, the Synoptic evangelists all recount the dramatic rending of the temple veil (Matt 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45). As noted in Chapter Four, each depicts the veil's tearing in different terms and toward various ends, but

⁸² Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 578-79. Similarly Hagner: "Jesus, crucified as a criminal and from the Jewish point of view cursed by God, is nevertheless given an honorable burial. Indeed, he is buried in the tomb of a rich man" (*Matthew 14-28*, 859). So also Green, with reference to Luke's account: "Emphasized in this transitional scene is the honor Jesus receives at the hands of Joseph of Arimathea and anticipated in the women's preparation of spices and ointments — honor far surpassing anything expected of an executed criminal in either Roman or Jewish tradition" (*Luke*, 829).

all of them conceive of the event as being linked closely with the death of Jesus. All of the unusual phenomena that accompany his death alert the reader to its *gravitas*.⁸³

Additionally, both events include characters who identify Jesus as “King of Israel.” After Salome performs her examination of the Virgin, the angel instructs her to reach out (προσφέρειν) and pick up (βαστάζειν) the infant Jesus in order to be healed (PJ 20:2-9). She says, “I will worship (προσκυνήσω) him because he has been born King of Israel (Βασιλεὺς τῷ Ἰσραήλ)” (PJ 20:10). Her profession of faith is echoed in Matthew and Mark, where Jesus is ridiculed by those gathered at his cross. In Matthew, he is mocked by the chief priests, scribes, and elders: “He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel (βασιλεὺς Ἰσραήλ); let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him” (Matt 27:42). Similar characters taunt him in Mark: “Let the Messiah, the King of Israel (βασιλεὺς Ἰσραήλ), come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe” (Mark 15:32).⁸⁴

The mockery of these characters in Matthew and Luke sets up a situation similar to Salome’s after the birth. Her remark, “Unless I put my finger into and examine her φύσις, I will not believe that a virgin has given birth” (PJ 19:19), implies that she is willing to believe that Mary has remained a virgin through parturition if she can find a reason for doing so. Those who chastise Jesus suggest similarly, “We will believe that you are the King of Israel if

⁸³ Like the suspension of time at the birth of heroes, the notion that strange happenings often coincided with the death of a great person is not uncommon in antiquity. So Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 506, citing *b. Mo’ed Qat.* 25b; Diogenes Laertius, *Vit.* 4.64; Plutarch, *Caes.* 69.3-5; Virgil, *Georg.* 1.463-68. Also Collins: “The pre-Markan passion narrative shared features with accounts of the deaths of famous people circulating in the cultural context of the early Roman empire in the eastern Mediterranean world” (*Mark*, 752). See also *Ps.-Mt.* 13:2; *Arabian Infancy Gospel* 3; Origen, *Cels.* 1.34, 38.

⁸⁴ In Luke, the soldiers call him (sarcastically) “King of the Jews (ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων)” (23:36-37).

we see you come down from the cross.”⁸⁵ But while they invite him to display his authority, to prove that he is who he has claimed to be, they clearly do not expect him to follow through. The reader understands Salome’s willingness to worship Jesus as “King of Israel” as an intensification of the angel’s instructions to her, a genuine expression of her newfound faith. The characters’ proclamation in Matthew and Mark, by contrast, is thoroughly sardonic.⁸⁶

Finally, women (Mary, the midwife, and Salome) are present in the cave after Jesus’ birth and at his empty tomb in the Synoptic resurrection narratives.⁸⁷ In Mark, the young man at the tomb charging them with relaying a message delivered previously by Jesus himself: “Go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, *just as he told you*” (Mark 16:7 [emphasis added]; so also 14:28). And in this regard they are quite peripheral. What is more, if the earliest version of Mark’s Gospel concludes with 16:8, as most believe that it does, then their message is undelivered as well as redundant, for they depart in fear saying “nothing to anyone” (Mark 16:8). Their reticence is amended in the later endings (Mark 16:8b, 9-19) and in Matthew and Luke: in Matthew they “left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell [Jesus’] disciples” (28:8), and in

⁸⁵ Evans on the significance of the *vũv* in Mark 15:32: “The ruling priests invite Jesus to come down from the cross *now* (*vũv*), knowing that he will indeed be taken down *later*, when dead. Let him come down now, without further delay. Let him demonstrate to all that he is indeed who he has claimed to be” (*Mark 8:27-16:20*, 506).

⁸⁶ So Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 838; Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 538-39; Collins, *Mark*, 749-50.

⁸⁷ Mary the Magdalene and Mary the mother of James are accompanied by Salome in Mark, and by Joanna and “the other women” in Luke (Mark 16:1; Luke 24:10). In Matthew, they travel to the tomb alone (Matt 28:1). Mary the mother of James is called “the other Mary” in Matt 28:1, but this is almost certainly a reference to the woman already named in Matt 27:56. In John, Mary Magdalene is the only woman, and she is accompanied by two men: Peter and “the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved” (20:1-2). Salome is mentioned one other time in Mark, as a witness to the crucifixion (Mark 15:40). Joanna in Luke is a daughter of Herod’s steward who gives aid to Jesus and his disciples earlier in their ministry (Luke 24:10).

Luke “they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest” (24:8-9).⁸⁸

While the women at the tomb and those at the cave serve as witnesses to the miraculous, neither group actually sees the miracle to which they testify. In the resurrection narratives, what they experience is not the resurrection itself but one of its *effects*: the empty tomb.⁸⁹ Similarly, in PJ the birth of Jesus is not narrated, obscured as it is by the cloud and the light.⁹⁰ Mary is the only character who is in a position to perceive what is taking place, but even this is uncertain. Like the women who behold a consequence of the resurrection—the absence of a corpse—so do the women at the cave witness corollaries of the birth—the presence of a newborn and a no-longer-pregnant Mary. Both events occur “off-screen,” as it were.

⁸⁸ Why Mark would include the women in his account only to neutralize their role as witnesses to the resurrection prompts the question, Why include them at all? One possibility is that the episode is a pre-Markan tradition (Bultmann, *History*, 284-87) or, in the words of J. M. G. Barclay, that its presence in the second gospel is a “literary necessity.” That is, “if Mark was working from a source which had only women as witnesses of the burial of Jesus, only they could be responsible for discovering the empty tomb” (“The Resurrection in Contemporary New Testament Scholarship,” in *Resurrection Reconsidered* [ed. Gavin D’Costa; Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1996], 23). So also Rudolf Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium: II. Teil. Kommentar zu Kap. 8:27-16:20* (HTKNT; Freiburg: Herder, 1984), 519-28; Hooker, *Mark*, 383. It is entirely possible that the empty tomb narrative was created by Mark (so Collins, *The Beginning of the Gospel: Probing of Mark in Context* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991], 129-38), but the inclusion of the women in Mark may also evidence their historicity. So Cranfield: the presence of women at the tomb “is a feature which the early Church would not be likely to invent” (*The Gospel According to Saint Mark* [CGNTC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959], 463). Similar arguments in Pheme Perkins, *Resurrection: New Testament Witness and Contemporary Reflection* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1984), 94; Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 537; Susan Miller, *Women in Mark’s Gospel* (JSNTSup 259; London: T&T Clark, 2004), 176.

⁸⁹ The perfect tense in Mark and Luke makes this clear: “the stone ... had already been rolled back (ἀποκεκύλισται)” (Mark 16:4); “they found the stone rolled away (ἀποκεκυλισμένον)” (Luke 24:2). In Matthew they see an angel roll the stone away (28:2) but they do not witness the resurrection itself.

⁹⁰ So Hock, *Infancy Gospels*, 67.

5.4.3.2. Antitheses

For all these parallels, the events are also marked by significant antitheses. One of the more notable is the contrast between the private nature of Jesus' nativity and the public nature of his death. Regardless of whether Mary actually witnesses his birth, she is undeniably the only one there for it: Joseph, his sons, and the midwife remain outside. That the cave is the only source of shelter for the laboring Virgin reinforces this notion. It is, in Findlay's view, "a secret place far from the abodes of men—[it] was not in Bethlehem, but three miles from it in a desert region; where more fitly could the great mystery of the birth of Jesus have been transacted?"⁹¹ While I have suggested in this chapter that the cave is to be considered as existing *in* the territory of Bethlehem, Findlay's point is apropos: Jesus' birth is an intimate affair. Jesus' execution, on the other hand, is public, witnessed by those crucified alongside him (Matt 27:38; Mark 15:27; Luke 23:32-33; John 19:18), various passersby (Matt 27:39; Mark 15:29, 35; John 19:20), chief priests and scribes (Matt 27:41; Mark 15:31; Luke 23:35; John 19:21), soldiers (Matt 27:54; Mark 15:39; Luke 23:36; John 19:23), and his own disciples (Matt 27:55-56; Mark 15:40-41; Luke 23:49; John 19:26).⁹²

A second antithesis, related to the first, is that Jesus' birth is unaided, while his death requires the efforts of many. Michaelis suggests that the location of the cave in the deserted (*ἔρημος*) country indicates that no one is needed to assist Mary in her delivery: when Joseph begins searching for a midwife, Mary is far enough removed from civilization and far

⁹¹ Findlay, *Byways*, 164.

⁹² This does not make his death unique; crucifixions were popular events by design. As Quintilian (ca. 35-100 C.E.) remarks, "whenever we crucify the guilty, the most crowded roads are chosen, where the most people can see and be moved by this fear. For penalties relate not so much to retribution as to their exemplary effect" (*Decl.* 274).

enough along in the process of childbirth that his chances of his finding a suitable woman are slim.⁹³ Even when he *does* locate such a woman, she arrives too late to be of any assistance. Conversely, many facilitate his execution. Pilate sentences him to die (Matt 27:26; Mark 15:15; Luke 23:25; John 19:16), the soldiers strip him of his clothing (Matt 27:28; Mark 15:17, 20; John 19:2), spit on him and beat him (Matt 27:30; Mark 15:19; John 19:3), and finally crucify him (Matt 27:35; Mark 15:25; Luke 23:33; John 19:18). In all three Synoptics, a bystander named Simon of Cyrene is compelled to carry his cross (Matt 27:32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26), thus escorting him to his death.⁹⁴ Simon's presence in the Passion Narratives, like that of the women at the tomb, appears to be a stock feature of the tradition.⁹⁵ Even John, who does not mention Simon, seems to convey an awareness of him when he has Jesus carry the cross "for himself (ἐαυτῷ)" (John 19:17).⁹⁶

⁹³ Michaelis, *Apokryphen Schriften*, 94-95.

⁹⁴ Simon is likewise mentioned in the fifth-century *Gospel of Nicodemus* (*Acts of Pilate*) 10.1.

⁹⁵ Green, on Simon's presence in Luke: it "reminds us that the mob shouting for Jesus' execution in vv 13-25 did not include all of Israel," and that "cross-bearing [is] integral to discipleship" (*Luke*, 813). Nolland, by contrast: "At the literary level it might be possible to think in terms of a mock enactment of the call to discipleship issued by Jesus, but it is more likely that we have simply a historical reminiscence of an action that was probably made necessary by the weakened state of Jesus due to flagellation" (*Luke 18:35-24:53* [WBC 35C; Dallas: Word, 1993], 1136; also Brown, *Death*, 2:914-15; Collins, *Mark*, 737; Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 511). Luz, on Matthew's account: "The narrator does not care whether Simon does it willingly or unwillingly. The readers ... may remember 16:24, the logion in which Jesus has called anyone who would follow him to 'take up his cross (ἀράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ).' While the language of the allusion is clear, its content is not clear. Here we are dealing with the cross of Jesus, there with the disciples' own cross. Here one is pressed into service; there we are dealing with freely chosen discipleship" (*Matthew 21-28*, 527).

⁹⁶ According to Brown, Simon's absence from the Johannine account is deliberate. He proposes two "highly speculative" explanations to account for it: first, that it constitutes John's refutation of the claim (addressed in Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.24) that Jesus and Simon switched places at the end of their journey, and that it was Simon who was actually crucified; and second, "that John was introducing here the typology of Isaac, who carried the wood for his own sacrifice." In Brown's judgment, a more reasonable explanation is that "John's christology has no room for Jesus' needing or accepting help," and that "John's omission of Simon was to emphasize Jesus' control or authority even in the crucifixion" (*Death*, 2:917).

Finally, Jesus' birth is painless, while his crucifixion is utterly agonizing. The absence of a midwife already suggests that his birth was uncomplicated, and one could see the austerity of the canonical birth narratives as implying the same (Matt 1:25; Luke 2:7). The notion that it was painless is evidenced by Mary's postpartum condition and the distinct absence of blood, both of which are suggested by Mary's immediate nursing. By contrast, even the thought of his impending execution induces dread. According to Mark, Jesus becomes "distressed and agitated (*ἐκθαμβεῖσθαι καὶ ἀδημονεῖν*)" (Mark 15:33) as he travels with his disciples to Gethsemane. Drawing from the language of Psalm 42, he says to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death (*περίλυπός ἐστιν ἡ ψυχὴ μου ἕως θανάτου*)" (Mark 15:34; so also Matt 26:38). His prayer is similar in each of the Synoptic accounts: "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want" (Mark 14:36).⁹⁷ Evans notes that this prayer "reveals the human Jesus who recoils from the coming suffering ... [he] is fully aware of the severity of the trial that lies ahead. No aspect of it—the arrest, the abuse, the interrogations, the beatings, or the crucifixion itself—will take him by surprise."⁹⁸ While the Passion Narratives are silent with respect to the physical torture of crucifixion, the scene in Gethsemane shows that Jesus neither expected nor experienced a pain-free death.

Jesus' bloodless birth also stands in contrast with his death insofar as he himself designates his death as an outpouring of blood. At his final meal with the disciples in Mark,

⁹⁷ So also Matt 26:39: "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want"; Luke 22:42: "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done." Certain MSS of Luke add that, as Jesus prays in the garden, his sweat pours out "like great drops of blood falling down on the ground (*ὥσεὶ θρόμβοι αἵματος καταβαίνοντες ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν*)" (Luke 22:44).

⁹⁸ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 418.

he offers them a cup that he identifies as “my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many (τὸ αἶμά μου τῆς διαθήκης τὸ ἐκχυννόμενον ὑπὲρ πολλῶν)” (Mark 14:24). The language is comparable in the other Synoptics, Luke altering the word order slightly (Luke 22:20) and Matthew adding “for the forgiveness of sins (εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν)” (Matt 26:28). While the Fourth Gospel lacks the institution narrative, Jesus does speak to his disciples in similar terms: “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood (αἶμα), you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink (ἀληθὴς πόσις)” (John 6:53-55). Aside from this monologue and a passing reference earlier (John 1:13), the only other point at which blood is mentioned in John’s Gospel is directly after Jesus’ death, when a soldier lances his side and blood comes spilling out (John 19:34).

5.4.3.3. The Birth of the Messiah

The parallels cited above establish the comparability of Jesus’ birth and his death: he is born in a cave and buried in a tomb; cosmic events mark the beginning and end of his life; women gather for his birth and for his resurrection; and he is identified in both cases as “King of Israel.” But the events are not homogenous, a point illustrated by the numerous antitheses existing between them: his birth is private and unaided while his crucifixion is public and the work of many; the birth occurs with neither blood nor pain, whereas the death is an outpouring of blood and thoroughly excruciating.

These disparities underline the peculiarity of PJ’s birth account: What sort of birth takes place privately, painlessly, and in the absence of blood? To be sure, the child born to Mary is not a typical human child. He is divine, so it is perhaps expected that his birth will

be unconventional. Moreover, his mother is exceptional in every respect. She is “the Virgin of the Lord” (PJ 9:7), utterly pure from the moment of her own birth, able to walk at six months (PJ 6:2), raised in the holy of holies, and chosen by God to bear the divine λόγος. The angel who delivers the news of her pregnancy already tells her that she will not have an ordinary labor (PJ 11:7). Even so, the author’s accentuation of the postpartum intactness of Mary’s φύσις seems to signal not only that Jesus’ birth is unusual but that it hasn’t even taken place.

What is absent from Jesus’ nativity is manifested clearly at his death, where the one whose birth was concealed from view is executed in the sight of many. Here the one born painlessly and without the aid of a midwife receives help in transporting the means of his execution and experiences a death so agonizing that it tears apart the very fabric of his being, symbolized by the rending of the temple veil. In contrast with Perseus, Zeus, and Hermes, whose fathers are uniformly missing from their respective births, Jesus’ father is present in the cloud that overshadows the cave (PJ 19:13). The absent father archetype is only satisfied at the moment of his death, when he utters the so-called cry of dereliction: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me” (Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34)? As Collins notes, “Jesus’ last words ... are passionate, expressing both the loneliness of intense suffering and a bold and demanding challenge addressed to God.”⁹⁹ In comparison with the quiet newborn who takes to his mother’s breast, the man on the cross laments his father’s absence. While the cave signals Jesus’ divinity, the *lacunae* in the account and their fulfillment in the Passion Narratives suggest that his role as Israel’s Messiah is not realized fully until later.

⁹⁹ Collins, *Mark*, 754.

The message Salome receives when she departs reinforces the notion that the story of her and Israel's salvation has only just begun: "Do not report the unusual things (παράδοξα) you have seen until the child goes to Jerusalem" (PJ 20:12). This is almost certainly intended to foreshadow the presentation of Jesus in the temple as recounted by Luke (2:22-39). The author alludes to this journey in a comment on Simeon, the priest chosen to replace Zechariah: "He was informed by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death until he saw the Christ in the flesh" (PJ 24:14).¹⁰⁰ The similarity of Luke's description of Simeon (in 2:26), coupled with the fact that Jesus does not travel to Jerusalem in the course of PJ, marks this as a point of transition to Luke's Gospel.

Simeon's words to Mary in Luke 2:35 — "a sword will pierce your own soul too" — coincide with PJ's emphasis on the interconnectedness of the Virgin and her son, but as noted in the introduction to this chapter, they also anticipate the latter's eventual death. The reader may therefore also see the message given to Salome as pointing toward Jesus' *final* journey to Jerusalem, the one that culminates in his death. When read in this way, her call to silence is comparable to those occasions in the Synoptics when Jesus, in order to ensure that his identity as Messiah will remain hidden until the proper time, instructs his disciples and those whom he heals to keep quiet (e.g., 1:43-45; 5:43; 7:36; 8:26, 30; 9:9).¹⁰¹ The events she

¹⁰⁰ So de Strycker, *Forme*, 167; Hock, *Infancy Gospels*, 69 n. 20:12. Simeon in Luke is not a priest but is simply a resident of Jerusalem who is "looking forward to the consolation (παράκλησιν) of Israel" (Luke 2:25).

¹⁰¹ Numerous hypotheses exist regarding the significance of the so-called messianic secret motif in the Synoptics. In Mark (in which the motif is particularly prominent), Collins argues that "this command to silence contributes to the theme of the mysterious and secret identity of Jesus" (*Mark*, 179); "The purpose of this command to silence is not to keep the identity of Jesus a secret. It is rather a literary device. The command is given only to be broken. The goal is to impress on the audience that the mighty deeds of Jesus are so extraordinary that they cannot be hidden" (*ibid.*, 374).

has witnessed are therefore significant, if incomplete: the one who is said to have been born King of Israel does not truly achieve this status until he is executed, buried, and raised.

5.5. Conclusion

I have argued that Jesus' birth in PJ is cast in theophanic terms: in addition to preventing those gathered from witnessing the event, the cloud and the light manifest the divine presence. The hiddenness of the birth itself distinguishes the narrative from those of Matthew and Luke, as does the emphasis placed on the intactness of Mary's *φύσις* after the birth. While Salome and the midwife conclude that the Virgin has in fact borne a child, it is certainly not to be understood as a "birth" in the natural sense of the term, since it has had no visible effect on her body. The author's goal of bringing to the fore the Virgin's enduring purity is essentially Mariological, but the account is also christological; the miracles accompanying Mary's labor, including her postpartum condition, testify to her extraordinary son.

But because caves in Greek and Roman literature and legend are often birthplaces of gods and heroes, the reader may also understand the space that Jesus is born in as indicative of his divinity. Yet evidence from the HB/LXX calls the fittingness of this space into question: caves are places for refugees and corpses, not infants, and especially not Mary's infant. In light of those places in the HB/LXX where caves serve as burial grounds, I argued that Jesus' birth foreshadows his death and interment in the canonical gospels, and that these events, instead of those in the cave, constitute for the reader the moment at which he is born Israel's Messiah.

CONCLUSIONS

Authors tell stories by means of commonly held literary patterns and conventions and by drawing on images and data that will be familiar to their readers. If this were not the case, their words would not make sense. If we have learned anything from the many insights of form criticism, it is that the way that a story is told is significant. But the same is true for the way that stories are *read*. Readers comprehend what they read not only through accepted literary conventions but also through their knowledge of other texts. And because it is impossible to “unread” something once it has been internalized, every act of reading augments the reader’s portable library, which alters how he or she will read and understand subsequent texts. This study has proceeded under the assumption that this is simply how reading works, and that it works this way regardless of whether one is aware of it.

I began by stating that this was a study about an ancient text and the reading of ancient texts. My aim has been to determine how an apocryphal narrative (in this case, PJ) might have been understood by a hypothetical second-century reader, and how this reader’s perception of intertexts may have influenced his or her understanding of PJ and the NT. Drawing from the work of Willem S. Vorster, I framed the matter as a question: How does intertextuality as a heuristic device, informed by more conventional author-centric exegesis, further our understanding of early Christian literature in general and PJ in particular?

In Chapter One I reviewed some of the contributions of intertextual methodology and attempted to ground these in a historically oriented framework. I proposed three controls to this end: the author’s meaning as derived from historical- and literary-critical methodology; the identity of the reader as a hermeneutical construct; and the definition of an intertextual canon. The goal was to establish parameters in which intertextual

phenomena could be simultaneously observed and contained. After surveying the history of scholarship on PJ in Chapter Two, I tested this methodology over the course of three exegetical chapters, each of which examined an episode in the life of the Virgin.

In Chapter Three, I analyzed the scene of Mary's presentation in the temple by her parents. I argued that the language of the account frames her presence there as a sacrificial one, and that she remains confined to the holy of holies for the duration of her sojourn. Two aspects of the episode—her dancing at the altar and her receiving food from the hand of an angel—layer the reader's understanding of it. In light of comparable tales of miraculous feedings in antiquity, Mary's angelic diet indicates to the reader both that she is favored by God and destined for a special purpose, which in this case is to serve as the vehicle for the incarnation of the *λόγος*. In light of dancing imagery in the HB/LXX and the Hymn of the Dance in the *Acts of John*, the reader is led to understand Mary's dancing as an act of cultic worship. But I also suggested that the reader hears echoes of the Muses and Charites, goddesses responsible for teaching humankind how to dance and thereby to worship and commune with the divine. The fact that she alone dances in the temple implies that she is the only one present who is worshiping the God of Israel, and in light of Jesus' criticism of the stubborn and faithless generation for their failure to "dance" (in Matt 11:16-17; Luke 7:31-32) her dance conveys a prophetic eagerness for the future mission of her son.

Chapter Four was devoted to the period of time, following Mary's departure from the temple, during which she and other virgins are summoned to spin thread for the temple veil. Her spinning, I maintained, ensures and perhaps reestablishes her continuing relationship with the structure that she was raised in. Additionally, her ability to spin with the other virgins indicates that she remains *παρθένος* even while she does not live in the temple. The fact that she receives word of her pregnancy while spinning establishes a link between her,

the temple, and Jesus, and this link is reinforced during her visits to the high priest and Elizabeth.

I reconsidered the significance of the Virgin's spinning for the reader in light of three images: the *Moirae* of Greek and Roman mythology; the tearing of the temple veil at the crucifixion; and the association of Jesus' flesh with the veil in Hebrews. I concluded that the reader may conceive of Mary's spinning as a participation in the forces that govern human fate and destiny, but that the rending of the veil limits the extent of her power in relation to the deity of whom she is a servant: she spins the thread, but God determines its length. The proposed understanding of the τοῦτ' ἔστιν in Heb 10:20 supports this reading; the equivalence of Jesus' flesh with the veil implies that the final significance of Mary's thread is in its *destruction* rather than its *creation*. The veil continues to prevent communion with God until it is torn in half, at which point the faithful are permitted (at least figuratively) to pass through it.

In Chapter Five I examined the episodes relating to the birth of Jesus. I began with the suggestion that Joseph and Mary are likely traveling *from* Bethlehem to an undisclosed location for the census, noting that the imperial edict would not have applied to them otherwise. I considered the suspension of time experienced by Joseph from a literary perspective, as a technique that draws the reader into the awe of Jesus' birth and fosters an air of anticipation. I argued that the events that transpire in the cave where Jesus is born cast the scene in mysterious and theophanic terms, and that the dialogue between the midwife and Salome (not to mention the ordeal undergone by the latter) demonstrates that the birth occurs in the absence of both blood and pain.

I then explored how one of the episode's more curious elements—the cave in which Jesus is born—might have been understood by the reader. Noting that similar spaces in

Greek and Latin literature often serve as the birthplaces of gods and heroes, I suggested that the reader may have understood the location of Jesus' birth as an indication of his divine status. I contrasted this with depictions of caves in the HB/LXX as places of refuge, scandal, and burial, and I argued that the cave prompts the reader to look past the bounds of the narrative and toward a cave that is more prominent in early Christian tradition: the one in which the body of Jesus is interred. Drawing from the parallels and antitheses between PJ's birth material and the canonical Passion Narratives, I concluded by proposing the cross, rather than the cave, as the point where Jesus is born as Israel's Messiah; while he is called King of Israel from the beginning, he only achieves this status via his suffering and death.

This study shows that while PJ was understood by its author(s) as a treatise on the life and person of Mary, it is also wholly (if subtly) a text that points to her son; even those components that would seem to have no significance apart from Mary herself exhibit christological undertones when they are read within a second-century literary matrix. Future studies may confirm that the author may have intended certain of these undertones; all the present study aims to demonstrate is that they are plausible from a reader's perspective.

The chief goal of intertextual methodology, as a heuristic device, is exploration—the testing of hypotheses formulated in the process of reading. In the exegetical chapters above I have explored and tested hypotheses that were formulated as I read and reread PJ over the period of almost two years. Many of the intertexts proposed in these chapters began as intuitions and grew, through wide reading and sometimes heavy lexical plodding, into their present form. And as the pieces fell into place, I was frequently astonished at how much clearer the text seemed to me. Some hypotheses seemed promising at first but ultimately proved to be unviable. In several cases I was disappointed when I found evidence that would challenge one of my forecasts or, even worse, no evidence at all. But this is how reading

works: hypotheses are made and then validated or invalidated. And it is through this refinement that our understanding of the text, its author, and its readers is reshaped and clarified. The judgment that undergirds this study, therefore, is that a text's meaning is most clearly visible in the process of communication that takes place between the reader and the author, and that readers, whether ancient or modern, have much to teach us about the texts that they read.

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